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A NAMELESS SIN

BY

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A NAMELESS SIN.

CHAPTER I.

AN HEIRESS WANTED.

It was a terrible temptation—Laure Roden stood quite powerless under it. She could not trample it under foot, she could not yield to it; a temptation, perhaps, greater than any placed before a woman yet. She had not reached the age when it is easy to make plain, formal, holy duty the first object in life. She was so young as to be in many things still only a beautiful, dreamy, sunny-hearted child; the delicate rounded figure, with its gracious curves, had in it the virginal beauty given by old masters to the vestal virgins; the lovely face had the first sweet bloom of youth, the golden hair was all sunshine. There was no age with its bitterness of experience to help her, no wisdom learned from sorrow; she was alone with her youth and her beauty, her pride, her dainty instincts, her refined tastes, her aristocratic prejudices, her longing for life; alone, with all these to meet the temptation that was to decide her future.

The picture is a beautiful one. Far away to the right and the left, to the north and the south, stretch the bonny woods of Aylmer, woods that are famed in story and song; a green, beautiful kingdom, full of music and perfume, where great trees spread their swaying boughs and birds built their nests—a kingdom all poetry. There was an open green space where the little house stood—it was called Beech Cottage—and Owen Roden with his fair young wife lived there. A pretty little house with a garden full of flowers in the front, and a garden full of fruit in the back; a house where the flowers ran riot, for the roses climbed over the windows, and the jasmine peeped in at the doors; the June sun was shining, the birds were all singing far away, the wood-pigeons cooed, and the ring-doves called

for their loves; the sunbeams fell in a flood of light in the little room where Laure Roden stood, with the great temptation of her life facing her.

The house was but small—the kitchen was small but neat and clean. She looked out of place there with her beautiful face and figure. She was standing against the little table, a small fire burned in the grate, and in a chair placed near the door sat an elderly gentleman, shrewd, keen of face and spare of figure, quick of speech, and with a very evident admiration of the lovely young girl before him.

"I ask no questions," he said, "I make no inquiries, I do not ask you whether you are married or not. I assume that you are not since you do not tell me that you are."

As he spoke she hastily hid the white hand on which shone the plain circle of gold—hid it, then flushed as she did so, and shyly turned from the keen, clear gaze of the stranger.

"I do not—in fact, I will not ask whether you are married or not; I repeat this that you may understand me. I am the agent of the Marquis Auguste de Bourdon, who has commissioned me to find his niece. I find her in you."

"Are you quite sure?" she asked, gently.

"Men like myself never make mistakes," he replied; "one such error would mar a life-time of success. I am quite sure that you are the lineal descendant of Jean Baptiste de Bourdon; I can prove it to you in three minutes."

"Prove it," she said, quietly.

The sunshine deepened, the music of the birds seemed to grow clearer and sweeter. "Prove it," she repeated.

Even as she spoke the sound of horses' feet was heard on the grass plot; then came the sound of a riding-whip rapping at the door.

The stranger hastily drew back, and Laure Roden said to him in a tone half of apology:

"It is Lady Cardin; I must speak to her."

She opened the door and looked at the proud, stately lady who sat her horse so well—a lady no longer young, but with the remains of what had been a magnificent face—a proud lady, who evidently considered her inferiors a part and parcel of the dust she rode over. No smile came to her haughty face as the beautiful girl bent before her.

"Is Owen Roden at home?" she asked.

"No, my lady," was the brief answer.

"Tell him when he comes, that Lady Cardin is very displeased over the Spanish birds. You will not forget?"

"I will not forget," said Laure.

"Pray do not repeat my words. Tell Owen Roden that he should have attended to them. You yourself must have a great deal of leisure time on your hands. Why did you not attend to them?"

"I never thought of them, my lady," was the truthful reply.

"You should think; the great fault of people of your class is that they never will think."

Then the proud eyes fell on a fold of her riding-habit that had grown dusty from the long ride.

"Will you find a brush," she asked, "and take off this dust for me?"

Laure's face flushed; a few days since she would have flown at those words of command from a great lady, now she thought:

"If what he says be true—if I am a De Bourdon, it is rather she who should wait on me, than I on her."

Then Lady Cardin looked up with such a haughty air of surprise and astonishment that Laure hastened to do her bidding. She found the brush and removed the specks of dust from the dark riding-habit, the groom looking on with stolid admiration at the beautiful face and white hands.

"Thank you," said her ladyship.

She was haughty beyond all words, but generous to her inferiors. She placed some silver in Laure's hand, and again the girl's face flushed hotly as she let the money slip through her fingers to the ground.

"How careless you are," said Lady Cardin. "Some of you people seem hardly to know how to use your hands."

She spoke with contemptuous hauteur, then she touched her horse with her jeweled whip and rode away, followed by her groom. Laure re-entered the house, the flush still on her face, and the proud light deepening in her eyes. The visitor looked up at her entrance.

"A proud lady," he said, "but she has the right to be proud. She is of high birth—'daintier clay' than those people who do not know how to use their hands."

Laure held out her hands as he spoke; they were whiter than my lady's own, with pink slender fingers, and a rose

flush in the soft palm. She looked at them steadily, then hastened to hide the one on which shone the plain gold ring; she gazed with clear, bright eyes into the stranger's face.

"You heard all she said—proud Lady Cardin; you heard how she spoke to me, her words, her tone of voice."

"I heard," he answered.

"And you tell me that I am a De Bourdon?" she asked.

"I can prove it to you," he replied.

"Then do so," said Laure Roden; "I am listening attentively.

With a keen, business-like air, Mr. Rodway drew his chair nearer to her, further from the door, and began:

"You will not find my story troublesome, nor will it take you long to understand. Years ago, the marquis—Jean Baptiste de Bourdon, one of the ancient peers of France—was banished from the kingdom, his estates confiscated, he himself a ruined man; he earned some kind of living here in England by teaching languages, here also in England he married quite a young English girl, who died when her only son was born. This son grew up, married in England—married a poor, unlettered country girl, who had two children, a boy and a girl—follow me patiently—the girl disappeared, married some young man of no account; the son was restored to the estates of his ancestors. But he, the present Marquis de Bourdon, refused either to live or to trust in a country so fickle as fair France; he sold his estates, keeping only the old Château de Bourdon, and he purchased Fernholme Abbey where he lives now. It proved to be a most fortunate purchase for him; a railway company bought, for an enormous sum, one quarter of the land, and in a remote corner was found one of the most valuable coal mines in England, so that the marquis is a millionaire."

"A millionaire," repeated Laure, wonderingly.

"Yes, that means a man worth a million of money; he tried everything possible to find his sister but could not; the only thing known of her was that she married and lived in London, that her husband's name was Knowles, and he was a writing-master. He died in London, and his widow, with one little girl, went away; after three years of patient tracing, of unwearied labor, I have found her grave and her living child; your mother's name was Augusta de

Bourdon, you are her daughter and the niece of the Marquis de Bourdon."

"Did my mother know who she was?" asked Laure.

"I should imagine not; there was no hope, no thought, when she was a child, of ever recovering the family estates and honors—no thought of it. She was called Miss Bourdon—people did not know even her right name; certainly, John Knowles, the writing-master who married her did not know, and it is more than probable that she did not know herself."

"She never spoke to me of France or the De Bourdons—I can not remember one word. You must be right—she knew nothing of it."

Mr. Rodway continued:

"The present marquis married a peer's daughter, who died a few years afterward, leaving him a son and daughter. By a strange fatality, they are both dead, and he, with his large fortune, his grand estates and ancient titles, has no heir or heiress. He did all that was possible in order to find out if his sister had left any children, and after having tried in vain for some years, three years ago he placed the matter in my hands. I will be quite frank with you, and tell you all that happened. He promised me five thousand pounds if I could find Augusta De Bourdon's child and take her to him; but to this there are certain conditions."

He paused and looked at her; a furtive light in his eyes, a quiver on his lips, a restless movement of his hands showed his agitation. She stood perfectly calm and still.

"There are conditions to everything in this world—what are these?"

Still an unaccountable pause. He looked at the green trees waving outside, he looked at the blue sky, at the red hanging roses, at the sunlight on the wall, at everything and anything except her. Her silence compelled him to speak, his lips grew dry, and his voice hurried at the words.

"The conditions are simple enough. The marquis is a proud man, and there is nothing he regrets so much as the low marriages which have ensued since the fall of the family fortunes; he told me distinctly that if I found his niece, and found her married, I was to leave her as she was—he would find some other heir or heiress; but if I found her

single, I must take her to him, and he would adopt her, make her his heiress. That is why I never asked you whether you were married or not."

"I understand," she replied; and then for some minutes there was silence between them.

CHAPTER II.

A WOMAN'S TEMPTATION.

MR. RODWAY was the first to break that silence.

"I have had great difficulty," he said, "in finding you; it has by no means been an easy task; I have worked both night and day. I had no clew; the only thing I was quite certain of was that your mother left London, taking you, a little child, with her, but to which of the towns or villages of England she went, I knew not."

"It must have seemed a hopeless task," she said, musingly.

"Yes, it did seem so; that is why the marquis promised to reward me so highly if I accomplished it. Five thousand pounds is well worth working for. If I win that, I shall not trouble myself to work much more; I shall buy a little house in the country, and there enjoy the remainder of my life."

She looked at him with calm, scrutinizing eyes. A little bird had flown on to the window seat, and was singing the sweetest song; its voice filled the room with soft trills of music. Her face changed slightly as she heard it.

"What if you do not win?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders, and answered, gravely:

"In that case, the marquis would defray all my expenses, and pay me for my time, but I should not have the five thousand pounds."

"Explain the conditions to me fully," she said; and he noticed that she turned aside as she spoke, so that the sunlight did not reach her, nor could she see the happy-hearted little bird.

"The conditions are very simple," he said; "I can show them to you in writing. By the desire of the Marquis de Bourdon, I gave up all other occupation and employment in order that I might spend my whole time in searching for his niece."

"What were you—what was your occupation?" she asked.

"I was a solicitor, without practice; then I became a private detective. Some little business that I had managed for the marquis attracted his attention and he made me this offer. The conditions are plain enough. If I find you, I am to communicate with the marquis at once; he who detests what he calls low marriages, distinctly declares that, if you are already married, I am not even to name my errand to you; I am to return at once, and the whole matter will fall through. In that case the marquis will send to France, and try there to find his nearest of kin, and make him or her the heir or heiress. He said distinctly and clearly that no other record should live of a low marriage. But if I found you single and all that he hoped you would be, I was to make arrangements for taking you to him at once. Your name he knows is Knowles, but so soon as you become his adopted heiress you will be Lady de Bourdon."

She caught her breath with a low sigh, her eyes grew bright.

"What else?" she asked, "what else?"

"You will be heiress of Fernholme Abbey, and of one of the finest fortunes in England. You will have such a future as falls to the lot of few people; you will have the world at your feet, and you may marry the noblest man in England, if you will."

He saw her face grow pale, while she turned the plain, gold ring uneasily on her finger.

"And if I should not marry?" she asked, with downcast eyes, and low voice.

"You would still be heiress to Fernholme, and would in that case have to choose your heir or heiress as you would," he replied.

She looked thoughtfully at the tall, waving trees.

"How old is my uncle?" she asked, suddenly.

"He is nearly seventy. There was quite twenty years' difference between your mother and your uncle; he was a man almost when his sister was born. She was brought up in the greatest poverty and ran away with the writing-master from a house where she gave lessons."

"Then he never knew her?" said Laure.

"Hardly. He remembers her as a little child; but

when he came into possession of his fortune, all trace of her was quite lost."

She glanced at him again.

"Are you quite sure," she said, "that there is no mistake—that you have not traced the wrong person?"

He smiled.

"I should not trust my whole fortune in any unsafe boat," he answered. "I have what must satisfy any creature living—the certificate of your grandfather, the ruined marquis's marriage, his death and burial—the certificate of your mother's birth and marriage—then of your birth, of your father's death. After that, with most minute and infinite research, I have traced your mother through all her wanderings, to each town, until finally she settled down in a little cottage here at Rosethorpe. Can you tell me how she lived here?"

A sudden rush of tears filled the girl's eyes.

"It was hardly to be called living," she cried, with sudden passion; "sometimes we had bread to eat, and sometimes none. My mother kept a little school; then, sometimes she found plain sewing to do. We were often hungry and often cold, until God raised us up a friend who —who helped us."

"A friend," he repeated.

Her beautiful face flushed hotly, her lips trembled as she answered him;

"Yes, a friend, the truest and best; we were lonely, penniless and friendless; he was a friend such as few know. Ah, do not tempt me, for God's sake do not tempt me. I must be loyal, I must be true; do not tempt me, for God's sake."

The passionate ring of her words died away, and the clear, sweet note of the little bird sounded in its place. He looked up with an air of bland surprise.

"You must not excite yourself," he said; "though of course such news takes you quite by storm. I do not quite understand. I am not tempting you; I tell you a plain, simple story; there are many such; at each great French revolution there are nigh-born men and women who come over here, and spend the remainder of their lives in poverty and toil; they intermarry at times with the lower class, more often, indeed, as a rule, they die in exile and the name becomes extinct; the number of ruined French nobles

who earned a precarious living in England by teaching is very great. Your uncle recovered his estates, because he happened to render a great service to the then ruler of France, and shared also in his political opinions. He was too wise to trust his recovered wealth in a country where revolutions are as common as the changes of seasons. Why do you say that I am tempting you? I do not understand."

Again she hid most carefully the hand on which her wedding-ring shone; again her eyes dropped from his, and her face flushed.

"Why should he care whether I am married or not?" she asked after a short pause.

"The marquis is naturally anxious; your grandfather married a peasant girl, your mother married a poor man of common origin; he believes honestly that a few more such marriages and the whole race will deteriorate; that is what he said to me; I can tell you nothing else. He impressed it upon me continually, that if you were married, the whole thing was to fall through; if you were single, I was to lose no time in taking you to him."

"It seems so wonderful," she said, "too wonderful. It has come upon me like a thunder-bolt. I wish we had known while my mother lived—I wish we had known earlier. I—I—"

There she stopped, and the half-formed words died on her lips.

The word temptation still seemed to haunt Mr. Rodway.

"I do not quite understand why you should ever think that I am tempting you," he said. "Of course it is quite at your own option. If from any reason of your own, you prefer remaining here, you are quite justified in doing so. You spoke of a friend who had been kind to you. I am quite sure that if the marquis knew of any one who had shown to either you or your mother any attention or consideration, he would do anything to further his interests in life."

"It is not a question of that," she replied, hastily; "as you say, you do not understand."

"I know that having lived long, perhaps, in this pretty village, you have naturally grown to love it; you have made friends here, you are attached to the place and the people in it. That is all right and natural. It is for you to decide whether the future will repay you for giving up the

present; of that you, and you alone can judge. It is a future that falls to the lot of few. You will be rich, beautiful, honored and fêted; you will have money and jewels, servants, carriages, horses, dresses, everything that a woman's heart can desire—everything that can make a life bright. You have to think whether this will suit you, or whether you prefer your life as it is."

A smile of something like contempt passed over her face.

"You know that I hate my life as it is," she said.

"I do not know—I purposely refrain from asking any questions, lest the marquis in his turn should press questions upon me. If I may judge from the cool insolence of the lady that came to the door just now, you occupy an inferior position—one, I should say, full of humiliation to any one proud as yourself. You must decide whether you will change this for one of honor and rank, where men and women will bow to you."

"I can not decide," she said, with sudden passion.

"You will when you have time to reflect; when your judgment is cool, yourself calm. I shall take no answer until then.

"There is one other thing," continued Mr. Rodway, "that I had almost forgotten, yet it is most important. The marquis wishes you to keep all this a profound secret; if he finds you all that he hopes to do, he will take you abroad for some time, then bring you back to England, and introduce you as his niece and heiress; he urges you to keep all your story a secret; you must not mention to any creature living what I have told you on leaving this place, you must leave everything—you understand me—everything; you must give up home, friends, all associations, in fact, you must die to the place; it must be as though you had never seen it. The Marquis de Bourdon is a proud man; he would never tolerate that your story should be known; you can see for yourself it would not do, it would prevent your success in society, it would always be a drawback; there can be no doubt about it, that if you become heiress of Fernholme, you must give up your old life completely, as though you lay dead."

He paused. She held up her hands with a little impatient cry.

"I wish that bird would stop singing," she said; "I can

not even think with that loud music running through my brain."

"You need not think now; you have plenty of time. You know the little town of Saltil, five miles from Rosethorpe; I shall be staying there at the hotel next week; come over and give me your answer. You will have had time to think by then."

"Will you not come here?" she asked.

"No," he replied; "I would much rather not; I have a great respect for the old house of Bourdon, and I do not like to hear its heiress spoken to by a woman much her inferior, as though she was a servant—"

"But Lady Cardin seldom comes here," she interrupted.

"I would rather you came to me at Saltil, Miss Knowles," he said.

Then he smiled to himself a crafty, cunning smile, as once more the young girl hid her wedding-ring.

CHAPTER III.

A NOBLE HUSBAND.

ONCE more she stood in the little kitchen alone—the stranger had gone. The little bird, trilling out its sweet soul in song, must have heard what she said, for it flew away dismayed to the green kingdom where every note was welcome. She drew a chair to the table, and hiding her face in her hands sat down to think.

Was it possible that all this could be true? Only a few short hours ago, and she had woke to the usual round of daily labor without a thought that time could change her destiny, without a thought that before the sun set her whole life would be revolutionized. She felt inclined to believe it had been the idle dream of a summer's morning. How long she sat there, she never knew. She was roused by a loving touch on her shoulder.

"Laure," said her husband, Owen Roden, "I have never seen you sit thinking before, my dear little wife. Where is my dinner? I am very hungry, and I have to go to Rosethorpe this afternoon."

She started with a little cry of dismay. She had forgotten all about her husband's dinner in the excitement of the morning.

"I am so sorry, Owen," she said. "I quite forgot it."

He laughed.

"There's a model housekeeper—owns that she quite forgot her husband's dinner. What shall I do now?"

"I will get something ready for you in so short a time that you will never know that you had to wait," she replied.

There, in the same kitchen, where she had just heard that she was the lawful heiress of a great peer, she busied herself in preparing some dinner for her husband. Crisp potatoes, new laid eggs, and slices of ham she cooked well, and while she was thus occupied, all thoughts of Fernholme Abbey, of diamonds, and carriages, of wealth and honor, faded away from her. She was Laure Roden, mistress of the little cottage, wife of the kindly, honest, handsome man who worshiped her.

"You take no dinner yourself, Laure," he said.

"No, I am not hungry, I will have some tea," she answered; and Owen Roden laughed.

"What women—I beg your pardon, Laure—what ladies would do without tea, I can not imagine."

She glanced half wistfully at his handsome, sunburned face.

"Owen," she said, "if you did not know me, and did not know my history, and met me anywhere, should you think that I was a lady?"

"A lady?" he repeated; "indeed I should, Laure; you are one of Nature's own gentlewomen. Why, my darling, I have seen all kind of ladies at the Hall, and there is not one that could be compared to you—not one."

"You are quite sure," she questioned.

"I am more than sure; Lady Cardin herself—people say she was one of the very loveliest women in England—her face is not to be compared to yours."

"Are you flattering me, Owen?" she asked.

"Why should I? I always knew it was so when I used to walk around your little cottage, longing for one look at you; I always said to myself that you were beautiful as a young queen, and I only fitted to be your slave; I have been your slave ever since."

"But," she protested, "do I look as those real ladies look, Owen?"

"A thousand times better, my darling," he answered.

"Do I speak as they speak?"

"No, thank Heaven! your voice is sweet and clear as the music of a bird; not one among them has such a voice. When you move, all sweet music and grace move with you; to watch you is like reading a poem, to love you makes earth—heaven! I have seen no other woman, neither among the rich or the poor, like you."

"That is because you love me, Owen. Tell me, what would a stranger think of me?"

"If he had any eyes he must think of you as I do, Laure; if he were blind, he must worship you from the music of your voice and the soft, sweet touch of your white hands. I can not judge you from a stranger's point of view, but you would drive any man mad, as you have driven me."

"You look sane enough," she answered.

"Because I have won you; because I have caught the sweetest wild bird, and have caged her in my heart of hearts. If I had lost instead of winning you, I should have gone mad."

Her beautiful young face paled as she heard the passionate words.

"Is it quite wise to love any one so much as that, Owen?" she said.

"I do not know about its being wise, but I do know that it is natural," he answered, with a light laugh.

Still she looked earnestly at him.

"So many things might happen," she said; "for instance, I might die."

He clasped her in his arms, with a cry of mighty love.

"Die—you, my darling, die?"

"Yes, I might die, Owen; and what then?"

"I should die with you, my sweet. I have never forgotten what I saw once—a man lifted up dead from his wife's grave. If you were to die, my darling, before me, I should go and throw myself on your grave; I should throw my arms round it, and bury my face in the grass, and so lie there until I died. Death would not part us for long, Laure."

A slight shudder ran through her slender dainty figure. He clasped it the more closely to his arms.

"No two men are alike," he said. "To most is given a sweet, vague fancy they call love, which changes and varies with its object. To a few is given the one mighty passion that makes or mars a life. My love is not an acci-

dent in my life, not a pastime, not a mere interlude; it is my life, and outside it I have no life; so I say, Laure, that if I had lost you, I should have gone mad. So I say now that if you die, I should stretch myself out on your grave and die, too."

"I hope I am not going to die," she said, with a faint, quivering smile on her scarlet mouth.

"I am sure not," he said. "Why have we drifted into such a melancholy conversation? Kiss me, and forget all about it. I had almost forgotten to tell you that Lady Cardin wants to see you; her mania is pet birds, and as there is no chance with all these visitors that she will find time for herself, she wants you to attend to those three little birds that have been sent to her from Java."

"I do not like Lady Cardin," was the reply.

Owen laughed.

"Nor do I, particularly; but you will like the birds, they are perfect always."

Her face flushed a little as she answered:

"I do not like being treated as though I were Lady Cardin's servant either."

Then the handsome, honest face looked vexed and surprised.

"Servant. I do not know. I am her paid servant, and you share my position. You ought to be a queen, a grand lady; but then, you see, my darling, God has placed us here."

"I know that"—she began, but he interrupted her.

"I shall not always be head-gardener; some day I shall have land of my own, and plan beautiful gardens for my darling."

"Do you think so, Owen?" she asked.

"Yes, without vanity, Laure. Remember how I have studied all my life; I know the name, story, life, and temper of every flower or weed that grows. I know Latin quite as well as any Oxford scholar. I have Sir Joseph Paxton's example before my eyes; I do not say that I have a tithe of his genius, but I have talent of my own. I did not tell you, but last year Sir Reuben Moreton offered me three hundred a year to take the entire charge of his gardens in Wales. But I would not leave Aylmer Woods; I find time and means for study here. Now kiss me again, little wife —kiss me for all I mean to do in the future."

She threw her white arms round his neck and kissed him, then hid her face on his breast with a little moan.

He fancied she did not like going to the Hall, and caressed the bright hair that waved on her shoulders.

"You shall not go to the Hall, if you really dislike it, Laure," he said; but she, raising her head with a sigh, answered him that the change would do her good, and that she would go that afternoon. He was quite content. Then he looked anxiously in her face.

"It is not likely," he said, "that a rough man like myself should understand a delicate lady-bird like you; but there is something in my darling's face to-day I have never seen before. What is it?"

She turned away from him with a quick, sudden flush; then she looked at the little clock.

"It is past two, Owen; you must go," she said.

"Yes, I must go. I do not like leaving you, Laure. How pleased I shall be when I can spend some part of the day with you. I shall be back by nightfall."

He went away, and Laure, following him to the door, stood and watched him. There were not many finer-looking men in England than Owen Roden. His frank, handsome face was full of health and activity. One could see at once that he was not what society calls a gentleman; his hands were not white and useless; there was no affectation about him, but his face had in it keen refinement. There was a promise of power in it. One could judge from his appearance that he was far above the average, and that he would some day make his mark in the world. He was of the Saxon yeoman type—a strong, well-built figure, with broad shoulders and a broad chest, carrying himself with a certain ease and grace of manner that was pleasant to see. He had a frank, open face, fair but for the sun-stains, with brown hair that grew in picturesque clusters.

Laure watched him as he walked with a quick, swinging step; then she fell on her knees, with a sudden, sharp cry.

"Keep me from it, oh, my God!" she prayed; "do not let it come near me. I should be the most wretched, the most guilty, the most miserable of sinners if I ever thought of it. Let me die rather than sin so grievously."

She was worn out and tired with the excitement and

emotion, and, laying her head on the hard, wooden chair, she fell asleep.

The little clock was striking four when she awoke from a confusion of dreams. She remembered Lady Cardin, and knew that by this time she ought to be at the Hall. She dressed hastily, and walked rapidly through the park. The lovely golden sunlight lay all around it; the birds were singing; the flowers all in bloom; the sweet, south wind whispered all around her. It seemed to her that the morning had been but a dream—a dream of ambition, of pride and vanity.

She laughed softly as she said the words "Laure de Bourdon—what a beautiful name!" and she so plainly dressed, the wife of the head-gardener, a paid servant as her husband had said, she was heiress of an estate far more valuable than this—who would believe it? If she met any one and said to them, "I am a great heiress," who would believe her? She was Owen Roden's wife, and yet, if it were all true, what a bewitching dream it was.

"And I have longed for it all my life," she said, "all my life. Can it be true, it has come now, and is too late?"

The next minute she stood on the threshold of the great mansion that had always seemed to her the noblest residence in England.

"What would Lady Cardin say if I sent in my name as Lady Laure de Bourdon?" she thought; and then the door was opened, and she stood the humble dependent in the great entrance hall.

CHAPTER IV.

"I SHALL REPAY SCORN FOR SCORN."

"THE young person has called about the birds, my lady," said the footman, and Laure's face flushed as she heard the words.

There was an innate refinement about her, which had always made her a slight object of wonder and suspicion to those whom she considered her equals. Any other in her place would have answered the footman's remarks about the beauty of the day, with bright, pleasant words; Laure did not even hear them.

She was shown into the beautiful room where my lady

sat reading. Lady Cardin did not even raise her eyes as she entered; she laid down her book with a cool inclination of the head.

"She thinks I am like the dust under her feet," said Laure to herself, "and in reality, in truth, I am better than she is."

"Sit down," said my lady; "I have a note to write, then I will attend to you."

She obeyed; she sat down and lost herself in admiration of the magnificent room.

The ceiling was painted by one of the first artists of the day; the hangings were of purple and gold, the carpet so thick and soft that no footstep could be heard thereon, the pictures were masterpieces of art; from the rich hangings came the gleam of marble statues, from the costly jardinieres came the rose sweet fragrance of the flowers; books, music, a thousand beautiful objects lay in mystic confusion.

Laure looked at them silently, and a longing, made of envy and love for the magnificent room, came over her. She longed with her whole soul for that which she saw around her. Then she remembered that it was hers; that she had but to speak one word, to stretch out her hand, and more than this would fall to her lot. Could it be possible that she sitting there in such humble guise, awaiting the great lady's pleasure, that she was a far greater lady herself? Then she was startled to find Lady Cardin's eyes fixed on her with a peculiar look.

Her ladyship was secretly thinking how completely that beautiful girl looked at home in the midst of her magnificent surroundings. My lady was examining her critically, the tall figure, so slender and graceful, with its gracious curves and harmonious movements, the grace and freedom, the grandeur of every gesture, the slender white throat, the beautiful shoulders and white shapely arms, the hands that were like snow-flakes, despite the hard work she did. The wealth of golden-brown hair that defied all order and all attempts at restraint, that waved in such luxurious masses as would have gladdened the eyes and heart of an artist; on to the exquisite face—a face that defies description as it defied comparison, at once proud and tender, dainty and delicate, full of soft patrician beauty, a face that might have blushed under the weight of a crown, for

it had all the fire, the poetry, and the dreamy loveliness poets give to the face of a queen.

Lady Cardin watched the bright violet eyes, the scarlet mouth, with its beautiful curves and delicious dimples, the straight brow that makes the face of any woman beautiful to see, the white chin, and the complexion, fresh and lovely as the leaves of a rose.

"If I had a daughter as beautiful as that," said my lady, to herself, "I would make her the second woman in England; only the queen should take precedence of her—and she is a peasant born!"

She felt angry that this peasant girl, her head-gardener's wife, should have this priceless dower of beauty, while her daughters were plain and ungainly as well; it was not right or fair. She looked at the lovely face.

"You must have been married very young," she said.

"I was seventeen, my lady—seventeen and three months," she answered.

"How long have you been married?" asked Lady Cardin.

"Five months," said Laure.

"So that you are not eighteen yet. I can not think why young girls are always in so great a hurry to take the troubles of life on themselves. Why did you marry so soon?"

"I had no home, no mother, no friends, no money; I was alone and quite helpless."

"I hope you married for love," said my lady, gravely.

Laure's face flushed again. She felt the impertinence of the words.

"I ask you," continued her ladyship, "because a girl left alone in the world so often marries the first man that asks her, and then goes wrong afterward."

"Goes wrong," said Laure, indignantly. "I do not understand."

"You know what I mean," said her ladyship, indignantly. "Grows tired and discontented, and all that kind of thing."

"If she only knew," thought Laure, "what would she say—if she only knew?"

"Your husband is a good man and a clever man," said Lady Cardin; "be kind and attentive to him. I foresee that he will make his way up in the world if he has a good

wife to help him. Now come with me to see my beautiful birds from Java."

My lady wore a dress of rich purple velvet with some magnificent diamonds. Laure watched her as the rich dress swept the ground; she followed her through the magnificent suite of rooms; she saw all the evidence of unbounded wealth; silken hangings, rare pictures, mirrors, lusters, costly flowers, the most exquisite furniture. She went through the broad, beautiful corridors lined with pictures and flowers. She saw beautiful women in rich dresses and jewels, and her whole soul was moved by these outward signs of magnificence. They went through the state drawing-room, where the splendor was so great it seemed to take the very breath of her life away. Then they came to the conservatories. She quite lost herself in that vista of glass fountains and flowers; it was the first time she had ever seen them, and the sight overpowered even her fear of Lady Cardin.

"How beautiful!" she cried. "I did not know there were such places on earth."

Her ladyship smiled just a little.

"Of course not," she said; "how should you know?"

Again the thought rose to Laure's mind:

"I may have a home even more beautiful than this if I will."

Some one came to speak to Lady Cardin, so that again she had to rest while she waited her ladyship's pleasure. She looked around her. How glorious it was, this vista of glass, of shining fountains and blooming flowers; how grand to be mistress of a beautiful home like this; to have servants waiting the words that fall from one's lips; to have all the wealth of the world brought to one's feet! As she sat and watched, the love of the world and its vanities entered into her heart—the love so fatal to women, more fatal a thousand times than the love of man—the love of pomp and of pleasure, of gayety, and wealth: she opened her heart to it. She who had knelt only a few hours before, praying God to keep the temptation from her, now said to herself that this kind of life was the only life worth living; that love, honor, duty, and truth held no place by the side of this bliss. A little further on a large sheet of plate-glass reflected the gorgeous spray of a fountain; she walked over to it, and looked critically at herself. She had

thought but little of her own beauty before this; now it startled her. She saw a queenly figure and a lovely face that looked quite in harmony with the beautiful surroundings.

"I am better looking than any of the ladies I have seen here," she said. "I believe that I could hold my own among them; how I should like to try."

She was lost in a vision of what she should do if ever she was mistress of such a palace; how she would pay back the haughty insolence of these ladies; how she would reign over them, crush them with her own splendor; how she would give balls, parties, fêtes, and make every hour one of the most intense delight, and full of pleasure. She was lost in this delicious reverie when a voice near her said:

"Pray mind, Mrs. Roden, you are quite close to my Indian lily, and one touch would spoil it."

Then she saw Lady Cardin, followed by a servant carrying a beautiful gilt cage in his hand.

"These are the birds. Your husband is so clever at everything of this kind; he promised me that you should look after them; they want keeping very warm, and feeding with the seeds that Owen Roden will procure for you."

The man placed the cage in Laure's hand, but my lady was not quite pleased with the manner in which she received it.

"You promise me," she said, sharply, "that you will attend to them? I will reward you very handsomely if you can keep them alive."

"I do not want any reward," said Laure. "I will do my duty to them."

Lady Cardin laughed, not a pleasant laugh.

"It is a novelty to meet with one so disinterested," she said. "I hope the birds will not suffer by it."

Then the interview ended, and Laure retraced her steps through the gorgeous rooms, her heart hot with anger and wounded pride.

"How I should like to have told her that my name is older than hers, and my rank greater!" she thought. "If ever I take my place in the world, and should meet either my lady or her daughters, I shall be able to repay scorn for scorn."

Once more she was out in the woods, leaving the magnificent house, with its glow of wealth, behind her; but

this time there was more in her heart than there had been before. She walked through the sunlight, and she had no thought for the trees or the flowers, for the birds or the sweet long grass. How haughty and insolent Lady Cardin was to her; how she longed to repay it! That she, a Bourdon, should be the paid servant of this woman!

"If she knew," thought Laure, with a sigh—"if she only knew!"

It had never occurred to her that there was any degradation in being the paid servant of another, but now the fact seemed to strike her with sudden, keen, unendurable pain. She hastened home, and put the little birds safely away; then there was a fire to light, and tea to prepare for her husband. Only yesterday how blithely she had sung while going about her work—how she had made dainty little cakes, and had prepared some golden honey, some ripe fruit, and had made quite a little feast for him. How Owen had laughed with delight as he saw the pretty table, and told her he should want no sugar in his tea if she would just look into it.

How far off that time seemed, and yet it was only yesterday, only twenty-four hours since. Now she was not inclined to work, she wanted only to sit down and think about the wonderful event which had happened, the story she had heard, the life which had opened to her. How could she realize it? How could she give her mind to those servile duties, when that brilliant temptation lay before her?

Then her husband's voice aroused her. He had come home for his tea, and his wife was dreaming by the window, and no fire burning in the grate.

CHAPTER V.

THE RIGHT AND THE WRONG.

It was but a trifle, but she always remembered how kind he was to her that evening. He said no word of reproach when he saw the empty table and the fireless grate; he looked at her with infinite pity and concern.

"You are not well, Laure," he said; "that long walk has tired you."

He unlocked the door of the pretty little parlor, a room sacred to cowslip wine and white tidies, and made his

beautiful young wife lie down on the couch to rest; then with his own strong hands he waited on her, made her tea, soothed and caressed her, wondering what had brought that white worn look to his darling's face, wondering what had shadowed the bright beauty.

Then he sat down by her side and talked to her in his honest, hearty fashion. How kind, how gentle, how good he was. Who else in the wide world would love her like this? Then, with a sudden cry of great remorse, she flung her arms round his neck.

"Help me to be good and true, Owen. My soul is weak, yours is strong."

"It would seem to be like helping an angel to help you," he said, wondering at her manner, while she lay with her head on his breast, saying over and over again to herself that she would rather die than leave him.

Next morning, when she awoke, the sun was shining full into her room, the roses were laughing at the window, the birds were singing in the trees, and she knelt down by the pretty white bed, praying God over and over again to keep the temptation from her, and to save her from herself.

Owen thought he had never seen her so good, so gentle, so kind; and yet there was a subtle change in her beauty that he could not understand. He left her, for he had to spend the whole of the day at Rosethorpe.

Then she was alone again with the greatest temptation of her life. The little cottage had grown too small for her. She put on her hat and went out of doors, out in the sunlit woods. She sat down under the shade of a great spreading oak-tree to think it over.

There came to her then the memory of a picture she had seen once called the "Two Standards." One standard was that of the lawful king, the other was that of his traitorous foe—the world was ranging itself under one or the other.

"It is so with me," she said to herself, "right and wrong lie before me. I can choose but one of them, there can be no compromise. Which shall I choose?"

The right she knew—she was Owen Roden's wife. His great, honest heart rested in her, her love was his life; he had no other thought, she was all the world to him. She was married to him, and her vows were taken for life; until death broke them she was his, and his only, for better

for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness or health; there was no power living, there was nothing that could break those vows for her. The right thing was to give her answer at once, and to say that all the gold in the world, all the rank and riches, the pleasures would not tempt her from her husband's side. That was the right, that was what she ought to do; there could be no excuse, no compromise. It was a terrible temptation, one she must not tamper with or play with.

She knew the wrong too—it was to tamper with temptation until it conquered her. She knew where it would lead her—to steal away in silence and secrecy from her husband's side, to leave him to the living life of anguish and the slow death of shame, to break her vows, to falsify herself, to blight her whole life, and then the end.

There must be an end—every green leaf rippling in the sunlight, every bird singing in the trees, every flower blooming in the sweet, fresh morning air, every blade of grass shining with dew-drops must die.

She was young and beautiful, the life was warm in her veins, her face was flushed with health, yet, like the leaves and the birds, she must die.

It was all well enough in this world, but what of the next? No nonsense of disbelief had ever reached her. She was simple enough and wise enough to know that a good life had its crown in Heaven, and that a bad life met its just punishment.

She made no false excuses to herself, she knew that if she deliberately chose the wrong, she need never raise her eyes with hope again to the bright blue heavens.

Then she tried to map out in her mind the two lives.

If she remained there would be the sweet, simple country life, with its innocent pleasures, the love and devotion of a husband who worshiped her; the calm, sweet consciousness of having done her duty; then, perhaps the pleasure of seeing her husband work himself up in the world, and make a place for himself there. That was the bright side; then there was the hourly drudgery, the details of the dull, monotonous domestic life; the poverty, the privations, the thousand wants; the patronage and pride of Lady Cardin; the fact that her great beauty—and she was only just beginning to see how great that beauty was—must be hidden always.

Then there was the other picture painted for her in such dazzling colors—the life that awaited her if she went away. It would be a sharp pain, she would suffer and her husband would suffer; but after a time he might forget her and even be happy with his books, his flowers and all that he loved so well.

And she—well, it was the wondrous dazzle of a golden light. She would be rich, and all her life she had longed so intensely for riches. She could brighten her rare beauty with jewels and dress, she could have carriages, servants, everything, in fact, that her heart most desired and longed for. She would taste the pleasures of life, for the world would be at her feet.

A dazzling picture—it was worth some suffering, some pain; it was the grandest day-dream that had ever come to any woman.

She rose from her seat under the spreading oak-tree with a long, low sigh. She loved life, wealth, and pleasure so well, it seemed cruel that she should have the chance of securing them, now that it was all too late.

She resolved to go and look at the little house where her mother had lived.

"I wonder," she said to herself, "if my mother were living, what she would counsel me to do?" and the answer came straight from her own heart: "Stay with your husband, no matter how you are tempted to leave him."

She walked through the woods and the pretty lanes that led to Rosethorpe. The little cottage where she and her mother had lived so long was just outside the town. It had but three rooms and in one of them Mrs. Knowles had a school. Laure shuddered as she remembered the small children with their torn books. She thought of her mother's face, always sweet and calm, with its look of firm, sweet endurance.

"I could never be as good as she was," cried the girl; "my heart and soul cry out for a thousand things that she never missed."

She leaned against the palings of the little garden, watching the small latticed windows. Here, in these rooms, her mother had lived and died—her mother, who had suffered such extremity of poverty, yet who was in reality a high-born lady, a descendant of the De Bourdons. What a strange fate! There was one thing she could not help

thinking—her mother had a good life, and she did not doubt that she was now at the foot of the great White Throne. Should she lead a life likely to take her there?

She bowed her head over the little flower-covered palings, and the tears fell from her eyes.

Day by day the temptation grew terrible and more strong to her; day by day the contest between good and bad, right and wrong, grew longer and fiercer. She took no ordinary precautions. There were times when she was tempted to tell her husband all, and ask him to shield her against herself. She did not, because she felt quite sure that the first hint he received of it would put it to an end forever. He would never lose his hold on his beautiful young wife, whom he loved so tenderly.

Day by day the details, the economy, the privations of her life became more and more unendurable every time she had work to do—fires to light, rooms to clean, clothes to wash; her whole heart and soul rose in fierce rebellion every time Lady Cardin, with her proud patronage, her haughty manner, came across her; she rebelled against it until the daily, hourly warfare became too much for her, and she knew that she could endure it no longer.

Perhaps the keen, crafty, subtle man had reckoned on this; perhaps he felt quite sure that left to herself she must fall, she must yield to the temptation. She must give way. That might be one of the reasons why he had impressed such secrecy on her. She began now to argue with herself, to find out reasons why she must be justified in going away; reasons that she chose to think made her sin less deadly.

She said to herself that when she married him she did not know herself; that she was a stranger even to herself; that had she known her name, her history, her prospects, she would never have married him; perhaps that in some measure would excuse her, would palliate her sin and make it less. She said to herself that she was a lady of birth, one of a noble race, quick to feel and resent, quick to love, quick to suffer, and that, as time went on she would be so utterly wretched that he would be more miserable with her than without her. After all it was no marriage—so she tried to make herself believe.

Owen Roden had believed that he was marrying a poor, penniless country girl, whereas in reality she was the heir-

ess of the De Bourdons. If he had known her real name, her real rank and title, he would no more have asked her in marriage than he would have asked Lady Cardin.

Yet, after all this she wept passionate, bitter tears, for she knew that all the false reasoning in the world could never make wrong right; that a woman must cling to her husband, and that no amount of false reasoning could make a sin anything but a sin.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW HE WON HER.

It was not many years since Augusta Knowles had entered the town of Rosethorpe, holding her little daughter by the hand. She was a gentle, timid woman, with nothing but sad memories clinging round her. Her mother was an English peasant, and she had inherited far more of her nature than of her princely father's. Their home had always been the very epitome of poverty; she could remember nothing else. It seemed to her that her father was an old gray-haired man when she was a child; of him she remembered nothing but that he was always sad. She remembered her mother—a beautiful, active peasant woman, with a bad temper and a loud, shrill tongue; she could dimly remember a great hush which fell over the cottage, and people telling her that her father was dead. Then came a long vista of sad, sorrowful years, when her mother scolded and upbraided her and wore her life away with complaining and longing for the absent son who had gone away from home in his early youth. When Augusta, full of wonder for a brother she had never seen, would ask questions about him, her mother's answer was always:

"Do not talk about him, child; he was twenty years old when you were born. Indeed, I can not think what you came into the world at all for. Do not talk of him; he has forgotten his mother."

So the grown-up brother, in some far-off land, the name of which she did not know, was a myth to her; he had no part or parcel in her life. When she was twenty-five years of age she went to a school somewhere near London to take charge of the wardrobe of the younger children, and there she met John Knowles. Out of sheer opposition her

mother forbade her to marry him; but in this Augusta would not be controlled. She married John Knowles, the writing-master, and went with him to London. Her mother died, and the girl never returned to her birthplace; it had not one bright memory for her; she never cared to see it again. If she had gone back she would have heard of all the incessant inquiries her brother made about her, of the rewards offered to any one who would find her. But she never went back; and so she never heard anything of it. No one knew she had married, where she had gone, or anything at all about her. She was lost to every one but John Knowles.

They struggled on for a few years. Laure was born, and John Knowles named her after one of his pupils; but even as she lay in her cradle, he would call his wife to look at her, and wonder whence she had that daintily lovely face. He died; and Augusta, weary of life, and everything in it, resolved to leave the great city and find a home where she could live in the fresh air and the golden sunlight.

She tried many places but liked none until she reached Rosethorpe, and there she said to herself she would like to live and die. She took the little cottage and worked hard for herself and her child. She was a good woman, true of soul, tender of heart; she was religious and earnest; she did her duty; she tried her best; she worked hard; she kept little Laure well dressed, well fed, and contrived to send her to school; the years of Laure's childhood were smooth enough.

Then the mother's strength failed and living became a difficult matter for them. She grew nervous and frightened, for she saw Laure growing up with a beauty so rare, so delicate, so wonderful in its type, that she was miserable over her. The strength of her limbs was fast failing her; the light of her eyes was growing dim; the patient, sorely tried heart had but little life left.

Food grew scarce; there was so little that either mother or daughter could do; yet nothing troubled her so much as when she looked on the face of her beautiful child; what would become of her when she was dead? Beauty was a most excellent thing when the girl who possesses it has mother, father, friends; but it was a deadly gift, she knew, to one who would be like Laure, friendless and alone. It was

then when want and privation had laid the little home bare, when anxiety for Laure's future was turning her mother's hair gray, that Heaven sent them a friend—that Owen Roden came like the good and true man he was to the rescue.

He came first to the little cottage, attracted by a rare fern growing in the little garden, and Augusta liked him at once; he was so open, so frank, so honest. He told her all his own story—how he had been born with an intense love for flowers and had given his whole life to the study of them. He was a botanist of no mean skill; and Lady Cardin offered him a post as head-gardener at Aylmer Park.

He told her all his history; how his father was a farmer, and wanted him to be the same; but that he had no inclination, and when his father saw the bent of his mind wisely yielded and sent him to study the art of gardening. He told her with no little pride and glee that he was writing a book on flowers; he spoke of them so earnestly—of their lives, their characteristics, their manners, their pretty airs and graces, until Augusta would grow frightened and say there was something weird-like about his words. Then he saw Laure and loved her. The frank, handsome, kindly young man loved her with all his heart from the moment he saw her; she was never once absent from his thoughts or his heart. He loved with the one great passion of his life, and it was no ordinary love.

He was so kind to them, gifts of flowers and fruit, everything that was useful and needful he lavished on them; he deprived himself of almost the needs of life that Augusta might have meat and wine. She ceased almost to thank him at last, for his benefits became so numerous she seemed to do nothing else.

The crowning of her happiness was when he asked her to give him Laure for his wife; the dainty, lovely girl was not quite seventeen, and beautiful as an opening rose. No woman ever thanked Heaven more than she did, when she knew that the one great danger she dreaded no longer existed, that her beautiful child would have a husband to protect her. Once or twice she did deplore that with all her beauty Laure would never be anything but a poor man's wife, that her great loveliness must always be hidden by her great poverty; yet it was a blessing to think that she would be safe. To Augusta there had never come

the knowledge of her illustrious birth. She had always had an idea that there was more or less of a mystery in her father's life, but she had never even suspected its real nature. Laure would be safe, and the mother died happy in that conviction.

How good Owen Roden was to her during her last illness could not be told; if he had been her own son he could not have done more for her; and Laure's loving heart went out to him in deepest gratitude. Her mother died with her tired head resting on Owen's breast, her hand locked in his.

And then, when some men would have betrayed her, some forsaken her, he treated her with the gentle deference due to a queen, made a home for her, married her, and took her there. Was there any love like his? She could imagine none. How he had wooed her; surely no mortal woman had ever been so gently, so delicately, so gallantly won; his courtship, as the country people called it, seemed to have been all flowers; there was no morning that he did not bring them to her, each one having its own little story to tell; he took her out in the gloaming and told her all the sweet, fanciful legends he had been so long in collecting; no princess was ever more daintily wooed and won.

He was so strong and so gentle, so proud and so humble, so much her master yet so much her slave, it was no wonder that she loved him and looked up to him with awe and respect. All these thoughts, these memories of by-gone hours came to her one morning when she was out with her husband, and watched his strong hands tending the delicate blossoms. How strong and brave and gentle he was. Surely if this proud marquis saw him he would relent, he would not wish her to give up her husband. She tried to fancy him at Fernholme, but she could not; the strong, stalwart figure with its vigorous movements, the handsome, honest, sunburned face would be out of harmony in that gilded palace; he would be out of place with white-handed aristocrats and useless dandies. Her heart wavered as she watched him. Who was like him, brave and gentle, tender and strong? who would ever have such love, such unwearied devotion for her?

"You are thinking about me, Laure," said her husband. "I know by the look in your eyes."

Her face flushed, then paled.

"Yes, I was thinking of you; I was saying to myself there was no one in the wide world like you."

"Why, my darling," he cried, with delight, "if you are pleased with me I am happier than a king."

Yet as she watched him more closely it came home to her more and more surely that he would never take his place among those white-handed aristocrats; he looked too earnest, too cheery, too full of vitality; she could never fancy him lounging in a drawing-room, talking nonsense to fine ladies; whatsoever he did must be earnestly done, must be always thoroughly done. He would never make a man of fashion, a fine gentleman.

He looked at her again with a smile on his lips.

"You are still studying me," he said.

Then he left the little weakly blossoms and coming to her, kissed her face and hands.

"My darling is studying me," he said. "When you look at me with that intent gaze, Laure, I feel quite nervous; there is always a lurking idea in my mind that I am not good enough for you!"

He wondered at the sudden passion with which she seized his hand and carried it to her lips. She was saying to herself could she ever leave him? and if she did what would happen to him? Could she leave this great loving heart that knew no other thought save love for her?

CHAPTER VII.

A SIN WORSE THAN MURDER.

ONE morning when Owen Roden came to his dinner his wife saw a look of unusual sadness on his face; he was more silent, more reserved than usual. Laure saw that something had disturbed him. With a woman's true tact she waited until he sat under the leafy vine, the song of the birds making sweetest music in his ears. Perhaps her conscience disturbed her a little. She looked at him, wondering if he had heard anything about her, then calling herself stupid for the thought—how could he? Then why did he look distressed? She went up to him timidly as he sat on the pretty rustic seat; she spoke to him gently, and there was a wistful fear in her eyes.

"You have been grieved over something, Owen," she said, "what is it?"

He roused himself and laid his hands caressingly on the beautiful head.

"I am deeply grieved, Laure; but I would rather not tell you why," he replied.

Woman-like, those very words piqued her; that he should not want her to know a thing was a matter of course, an immediate reason why she should know it. She touched his face with those soft lips of hers and said:

"Tell me."

"It is hardly a proper story for you to hear, sweet," he said, believing in his honest, simple fashion that the evil of the world was a dead letter to Laure; knowing too that if she expressed a wish he was utterly powerless to refuse it. "I went this morning to Martin Chapman's and found him in the greatest trouble and despair. I hardly like to say the words to you, but his wife—you have heard me say how poor Martin loved his wife—she has run away from him."

The words struck her like the shame of a terrible blow.

"Run away," she gasped; "why, Owen?"

"I can not tell you; some wretched story of passion and sin. She has left a little child only three years old. If you could have but seen Martin's face."

"Run away," she repeated; she could not get beyond these words. She saw her husband's strong hands clinched until great red marks came.

"Run away, yes. It is a cruel thing that such things must be—a cruel scandal that such women live—a cruel blow to an honest man; fancy the woman you have loved better than all the world—the wife of your heart, the mother of your children—running away. Bah, I hate myself for uttering the words."

She trembled before the strong passion and the just wrath.

"What will Martin do?" she asked.

Owen's face flushed a deep red, as it did in moments of great emotion.

"Do," he repeated, "I know what I should do were I in his place!"

She saw the veins in his forehead swell, his strong hands clinch themselves, the fire in his eyes deepen and darken.

"What would you do, Owen?" she asked; and but that

he was absorbed in Martin's sorrow he would have noticed the fear in her voice.

"Do, my darling, I would kill her first and slay myself afterward, that is what I would do. The air should never be breathed, the earth never burdened by the woman who betrayed me."

"But, Owen, that would be murder," she said, her heart beating fast and her lips growing white.

"Murder! there are worse and far more cruel things than murder!" he cried. "What is the death of a man's body compared with the torture of a broken heart—the mortal peril of his soul? I tell you, Laure, the woman who deliberately breaks the heart of a man, blights his honor and his fair name, commits a murder ten thousand times more deadly and cruel than she who stabs him to the heart or gives him poison to drink. I am young, but I have seen misery worse than death caused by the light wanton fancies of women. I say it would be a good thing if every woman who is deserting her husband were struck dead on the threshold of his home."

She shuddered a little and drew nearer to him.

"You are very strict, Owen," she said.

"No, my beautiful darling, I am not strict; but men do expect purity and goodness from women."

She bent her head until her beautiful face was hidden on his breast, then she stole one white arm round his neck.

"So, if I left you," she said, slowly, "you would kill me?"

He looked up angrily.

"You—for Heaven's sake, Laure, do not class yourself with that woman—do not speak of yourself in that way; it is a sacrilege; I will not listen."

She spoke with trembling lips and in an unsteady voice as she answered him.

"If we were ever to quarrel, or if anything happened, and I ran away—nothing about love—but suppose I left you for any—we will say worldly advantage—should you kill me?"

"I wish you would not talk about such things, Laure; that will never happen, thank Heaven."

"But if it did," she persisted, "should you kill me, Owen?"

"Kill you, my darling? Ah, no, never. I may say

such things; but I could never hurt one hair of your dear head—never!"

"Then what would you do?" she asked.

"Follow you like a dog, to the world's end, my darling, and die humbly at your feet," he answered her, "for I love you with the greatest and most patient love man ever felt for woman. But, Laure, you must not say these things; they sound like desecration to me. I can not endure them."

"Poor Martin," she said, gently, and then she was silent for some time, with her face hidden on her husband's breast.

Could she ever leave him? Was there anything in the wide world so sweet, so dear, so priceless, as this faithful love?

What was money? What was wealth, rank, title, honor, pleasure? Less than nothing; love was heaven, and heaven love; would anything that could be given to her compensate for the loss of this dear love?

Ah, no, a thousand times no; she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him again and again.

"I will never leave you, my darling," she cried; "nothing shall ever take me from you!"

"I know it," he said, gently. "I have never even dreamed of your leaving me. I wish that I had not told you that foolish story, it has troubled you very much; forget it, my darling; the foolish ways of foolish women need never concern you. I thought to myself this morning when I saw that strong man, beaten down by his grief and agony like a child, how very few men had a wife like mine. I do homage to your purity, your truth, your loyalty, as I do homage to your beauty, my love; I have never doubted you; I shall never doubt you; death and doubt will come to me together."

No, she would never leave him; she swore it while his strong arms clasped her to his honest heart—too honest even to doubt her; she swore it while his face was bent over hers, and he kissed her. She would never leave him; fortune might tempt her; rank, riches, pleasure might beckon, but she would never go—never; she would be faithful to him while she lived, so help her Heaven, she said.

So for two whole days she thrust that horrible tempta-

tion from her. She went to her mother's grave, and, parting the long grass, told her that she had been tempted almost beyond her strength, but that she had trampled the temptation under foot and would have none of it.

When the church bells chimed on Sunday she went with Owen to the pretty gray church. She sat where the light from the stained glass windows fell full on her face, where the sweet voices of the children fell on her ear; and she thanked God that she had trampled the temptation under-foot, that she was still by Owen's side, Owen's faithful, loving wife.

She stood in the green church-yard when the service was over, and looking at the peaceful graves her heart grew still with a deep feeling of content.

"I thank Heaven," she said, "that I have not forfeited the right to die in peace and sleep here."

She was so kind, so gentle, so loving that Owen was more enchanted than ever. So the weeks passed.

Then came a beautiful morning, when the air was full of fragrance and the lovely, laughing, sunlit air full of beauty. Owen had left her early, and she was starching the clothes. While she was occupied with her work, two gentlemen came up to the door; they wanted to see her husband on business. One of them, Lord Farnham of Farnham Court, had just received some very costly and precious plants from abroad; he wanted Owen Roden to see them. There was no man in that part of the country so clever and skillful over flowers.

Both looked up in surprise at the beautiful girl who came to the door.

Lord Farnham asked if he could see Owen Roden; and she answered, gently:

"My husband is not at home."

She blushed crimson as both gentlemen, with an air of profound respect, doffed their hats and bowed.

"I did not know that Mr. Roden was married," said Lord Farnham. "May I step inside and leave a note for him telling him what I want?"

She placed chairs for them and then went into the pretty parlor, to find pen, ink and paper for the note.

They were gentlemen, both of them, and men of honor; they would have kept silence had they known that she was compelled to hear every word they said; they would have

kept silence, above all, had they known what effect their words would have on Owen Roden's wife.

"What a beautiful girl," said Lord Farnham. "I do not know that I have ever seen a more daintily beautiful face."

"I call it a sin to let such a face be hidden in this little place," was the answer. "That girl would set all London on fire."

"Indeed she would. It is a case of blooming unseen. I must say that it seems a sad thing to hide a face like that."

And those words sunk deep into the mind and heart of Laure Roden.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WOMAN WHO HESITATES.

A LITTLE acorn produces a great oak tree; a few tiny seeds bring forth great waving fields of corn; a small leaven ferments whole bushels of flour. In the same way these words had fallen in Laure Roden's heart and had taken root there; how long they were in so doing, who shall say? how long they lay dormant, then slowly and by degrees began to take root and flourish, who shall say? They did so; their poison was slow and gradual, but sure.

She began by comparing herself with the others she met; by saying to herself that it was really a great pity that a face like hers should be hidden in that solitary cottage, with only one man to admire. The evil spirit of vanity entered first, and took possession of her; she thought more of her beauty than she had ever done; she spent whole hours in dressing the wondrous wealth of rippling hair; she went through the streets of Rosethorpe looking with keen eyes at every woman's face, then owning to herself that there was none so fair as her own. Yet the change in her was so gradual no one perceived it; even Owen was quite blind to it. Having once decided to her own satisfaction that she had trampled the temptation under foot, she grew careless over it; having once settled finally and firmly that she would not go, that she would not leave her husband, she began to think what would have happened if she had gone, how she should have enjoyed this pleasure, this gayety, and she was not wise enough to see that these

thoughts were but a continuation of the temptation, and that in yielding to them, she was yielding to it.

After lying awake through the whole of a summer's night dreaming of the grand inheritance that might have been hers, dreaming of jewels and dresses, fancying her own gorgeous beauty in most perfect array, it was hard to get up and light fires, to go through the small details of domestic drudgery; to find herself not much more than "a hewer of wood and a drawer of water."

By slow, sure, but certain degrees the temptation gained power over her; all the more sure and subtle that she was quite unconscious of it; day by day the home duties grew more intolerable.

"My hands are growing quite coarse and red," she said one day to her husband, and he looked at her in amaze.

"They are always the most beautiful hands in the world," he said; "and what you call 'coarse,' that is, traces of toil, I consider a finer ornament than gems for any woman's hands."

"You do not understand," she said, quietly turning away. How should he understand?

Another quick and sudden impulse that helped her on the road was this: She was walking one morning on the high-road that led to Rosethorpe, when a large riding party from the park overtook her. She saw beautiful women in closely fitting riding-habits, holding jeweled whips in their well-gloved hands, mounted on the finest horses. She saw gentlemen riding, like the cavaliers of old, by their side; she saw ladies in luxurious carriages, and her heart beat as she saw them.

Every man as he rode past gave her a look of admiration as she stood there that summer morning, under the rippling foliage of the tall elm-trees, waiting for the long cavalcade to pass; she looked the emblem of youth and beauty. Lady Cardin rode last, a handsome distinguished man by her side, and as they passed by her Laure heard the gentleman say, in a quiet tone of voice:

"Who is that?"

Lady Cardin smiled as she answered:

"No one—only one of the servants on the estate."

Her face flushed hotly, her soul rebelled against the words.

"I am no servant," she cried aloud. "I am a De Bourdon, a lady born to the purple, even as she is."

But no one heard the words; they fell unheeded on the summer wind. She stood quite still watching the graceful movements of the ladies, watching the proud gallop of the thorough-breds, watching the attention of the gentlemen.

"I might have that and more," she said. "I could shine them all down if I were to leave Owen."

It was but leaving Owen; she had no other claim, no other ties, nothing else to bind her; it was but "leaving Owen." She thought of his words:

"I should follow you like a dog and die humbly at your feet."

How everything had gone wrong in her life; if she had heard her true story only one year ago, she would have never married; but now—

Then, if Owen were but different—he was so honest, so earnest, so clever; but nothing could make him into what people called a gentleman; in the true sense of the word he was one; yet to attempt to polish him, to make him conform to the rules of society would be worse than useless; it could not be done; he would always speak the plain unvarnished truth; he would always laugh loudly when he was pleased; he would call things by their right names; and he had plain, old-fashioned ideas of men's truth and women's purity. There was no one, perhaps, in the fine world of fashion to compare with him, yet in that world he could have no place.

From that hour it seemed as though she went down; she had ceased to think what she would have done had this rich inheritance been hers, and began now to lament that she had lost the opportunity.

A thought came to her more dangerous and more subtle even than the temptation, and it was that she might go for a time. She had so intensely longed all her life to see something of the world and its pleasures, to enjoy riches, to wear beautiful dresses, it was quite foolish to throw away the entire chance. She might go for a time, just to see what it was like, and then come back. She said this to herself, yet she knew in her heart that if ever she tasted the sparkling wine of life, she should never come back to

its ties. Slowly, by degrees, surely she drifted into the very sin she had sworn never to commit.

She would go and see what it was like, she would have just a few weeks of this fairy life, when she could come back, and Owen would not mind a few weeks; yet even as she said it a certain conviction lay in the depth of her heart, that to Owen's home as Owen's wife she would never return again.

She would go on Tuesday—that was the day on which Owen was always absent twelve hours—he attended the market at Rosethorpe. She could go in the morning and he would not find out the fact of her absence until night; she could walk to Saltil—that would be better than going by train or by coach, there would be less trace of her. She had decided to go, yet the thought of it pierced her heart like the sharpest sword. She dare not think of Owen's grief, she solaced herself by thinking it was only for a time; he was a strong, brave man, he would not miss her for a time; she would not think of it, for if she did she could not go.

She was no model of perfection, this beautiful, motherless girl, and there were many things to plead for her. This was the one sin of her life, the one great error for which she suffered most severely, yet there were excuses for her. She had the fine patrician spirit of an ancient race, she had its love of luxury, its thirst for pleasure, its love of ease, its worship of the artistic and the beautiful; she had its fire and passion, its pride and ambition; she had its hatred of dry, monotonous detail, its contempt of servitude; and against all this she had nothing but the sense of duty, the knowledge of right and wrong, and the love of conscience. All her life she had rebelled against her poverty and obscurity; she had longed for the brighter side of existence, and now there was such a chance as she had never dreamed of having.

That is all the excuse that can be offered for the greatest sin and the most cruel wrong any woman can commit.

Tuesday morning came; she had driven the thought of it from her; she would not remember what her husband must suffer, she would not think of his pain or his anguish, she would only say to herself that she was coming back very soon, he would not be unhappy long. The sun woke her on that Tuesday morning; it had never been so bright;

surely the birds had never sung so sweetly, the roses had never bloomed so fairly; she lay quite still for some time watching them as they swayed in the western wind; never again would she wake in that pretty white chamber, with the roses peeping in at her window, and the peace of God in her heart—never again.

Life held brilliant hours for her; she was to become one of the most brilliant women in England, but the peace and the rest she lost that morning never came to her again—never again.

As she rose she said to herself it was for the last time there. Her face was white as marble, her hands trembled, everything seemed strange and weird-like; she knelt by Owen's side while they said prayers together, and when they had finished he kissed her, saying:

"Thank God for the gift of my dear wife's love."

For the last time she fed the little birds and watered the flowers, then made a tempting breakfast for Owen. He remembered afterward how she sat by his side while he eat it, watching his face intently with her beautiful eyes; how she had hovered about him, doing little acts of kindness; loading him with every mark of affection; and how suddenly she broke off and kneeling down by his side, clasped her white arms with a little cry round his neck. It was the last time, he was to feel the clasp of those dear arms no more until a colder hand guided them. For the last time he kissed the lovely colorless face, never dreaming that its light was to pass from it forever.

"Say you love me," she whispered; she, who had bartered his love for wealth, longed to hear an assurance of it; she, who with her white hand was plunging the sharpest sword into that loving heart, longed yet once more to hear that it was her own. "Say that you love me, Owen, and that I have been good to you," she whispered.

He laughed aloud in the fullness of his content—in the abundance of his happiness and the sunshine of his love; laughed while the white face on his breast quivered with pain, and the slender figure clasped to his arms trembled with emotion.

"My darling, I love you with all the love of my heart. How can I say merely that you have been good to me, when I know that you are an angel? Angels are all goodness."

"I am a miserable sinner," she answered, bowing her head.

"You are my darling wife," he answered, "and I will not allow you to give yourself those names. I must go, Laure, darling; it has struck eight."

He wondered why she rose so quickly and clasped her hands around him in that passionate embrace—why she held her colorless face to his, and kissed him as a mother kisses a child in the agonies of death.

It was the last time—oh, God, the last time;—her arms fell listlessly; the passion and love, and strength seemed to die out of her.

"Good-morning, Laure," said Owen. "Child, how you love me!"

"Good-bye, my love," she answered.

"Nay, not good-bye—that is a word full of evil omen. Good-morning. Say it, sweet."

"Good-morning," she said; and her voice was mournfully sweet as the last notes of the ring-dove.

Once more he touched the white lips with his own, then he turned away and went out at the open door. She followed him; she watched the tall, strong figure until it disappeared among the trees; there she stood, the sun shining on her white face, saying to herself:

"It is the last time—oh, my God, the last time."

CHAPTER IX.

A SAD PARTING.

THERE was one more thing to do. She had been lying, it seemed to her, for hours on the soft, thick grass; she remembered falling there, faint and helpless, a great darkness over her eyes, the chill of death in her limbs. She was roused only by the loud singing of the birds.

She had one thing more to do—only one. There was no clothes to be packed; the simple attire that had suited Owen Roden's wife would be absurd in the eyes of the Marquis de Bourdon. There was no box, no traveling-trunk; she took nothing with her from her husband's home. But one thing remained to be done; the very thought of it made her heart turn sick with unutterable shame and fear. She must take off her wedding-ring.

She was to present herself as unmarried, or the proud marquis would not recognize her as the wife of a poor man; it would be necessary therefore to remove her wedding-ring. She hated the thought of it; she hated herself for doing it, yet it must be done.

She went up into her little bedroom; it seemed to her like robbing the dead. She stood for one moment to think of the hour in which that ring had been placed on her finger; her mother had only been four weeks dead, and her husband's love was mingled with deepest pity. She could remember the expression of his face, the love that shone in his eyes, and seemed to transfigure him; she remembered the clasp of his hand, the solemn words, and the way in which he had kissed the white hand whereon the ring shone.

Now it must come off; death had not divided them, yet they were to be apart for evermore. It was like looking on the face of the dead; it would have been easier to have plunged a dagger in her husband's heart than to have taken off that ring, yet it had to be done. She tried to think of what laid beyond it—of the freedom, the wealth, the pleasure, the bright unknown world, so fair and brilliant. What was it but a ring, a simple gold ring of no great value; yet the wearing of it bound her captive in unyielding chains; taking it off seemed to free her.

It must go; it seemed to burn her finger, to press round it like a ring of fire. Why should she feel as though she were robbing the dead?

Poor little ring, it came off easily enough, and she looked at it as it lay in her hands; fitting emblem; it was easy to take off that, but was it so easy to break the vows that bound her, to break the solemn pledge given at the altar, to break the oath registered in heaven? She wrapped the ring in finest paper. In after times, when money was like dross to her, she purchased a thick locket of pure gold, and putting the ring inside, wore it round her neck while she lived; but in these earlier days she wore it fastened in the bodice of her dress.

Then it seemed to her she was free. On the white hand no ring shone; she said to herself that she must forget the past; that it must be a sealed book to her, yet she began in a strange way; she kissed the pillow where her husband's head had lain, the ground on which he had stood, the little room that had been to her like a shrine, the hundred and

one things that he loved—kissed them as though they had been living, and could understand her.

She stood for a few minutes at the threshold of the door; perhaps some good spirit spoke once more to her; perhaps some words of a prayer hovered over her lips; perhaps remorse and regret were too strong for her to quite ignore them. Never again would she stand under the light of heaven with a stainless soul. There was something more than love in the passion with which she knelt and kissed the threshold of the door, where she left her innocence, her peace of soul, her rest and her content, taking with her a remorse that would not leave her until her dying day.

It was with the sun shining over her, the birds singing in her ears, amid the blooming of the flowers, the ripple of the leaves, the waving of the sweet-scented grass, that she left the home where she had been worshiped as few women are, and loved with a love beyond that of man. She never looked behind her; she never turned to gaze once more on the humble little home that henceforth she was to see only in her dreams; she walked on quickly, crushing the wild flowers under her feet, hastening as though life depended on her speed. She chose the most unfrequented paths; she made a détour of many miles, so that she might not meet people she knew, and in that she was fortunate; during her whole walk she did not meet one person whom she knew.

It was afternoon when she reached the pretty town of Saltil. She went at once to the hotel, and asked for Mr. Rodway. She was told that he was there, and she was ushered into a dim little sitting-room to wait for him.

There was no smile of triumph on his face when he saw her that might have stung her. He did not exclaim, "I knew you would come," but he looked at her gravely, dispassionately. He held out his hand to her.

"I am glad to see you," he said, gently; "I have waited a fortnight over the time. I thought that you would have written if you had quite given up the idea of coming. You are looking very ill."

The last words seemed to be startled out of him by the earnest gaze in her colorless face.

"The walk is long and has tired me," she replied.

"Walk! Did you walk? Why not have come by train?" he asked.

Then it occurred to him that she had not wished to leave any trace of her journey.

"Perhaps you are right," he said; "you know best. Let me bring you a glass of wine; that will refresh you better than anything else."

"I have never tasted wine," she said; and Mr. Rodway laughed.

"There are not many people in the world who can say that," he replied. "Let me advise it. You will find it a good cordial."

She drank the glass of wine, and it gave her some little strength. He sat opposite to her, calm, cold, unmoved—a man of business, nothing more.

"Now if you feel better," he said, "shall we begin to discuss business? I have not written to the marquis yet."

"Not yet?" repeated Laure.

"No; I did not feel justified in doing so; now I will. Now if you will authorize me, I will write and say I have found his heiress. You authorize me to say that you are unmarried."

She held out her hands before him—the bare, white hands on which no wedding-ring gleamed.

"That is answer sufficient," she said, "I wear no wedding-ring."

He smiled, a slow, thoughtful smile. He was sensitive enough to understand how she shrunk from the torture of saying the words.

"Pardon me, that is not quite enough. I prefer the assurance of your own words."

"I am not married," she said.

He bowed.

"You authorize me also to state that you are perfectly willing to accept the conditions of the marquis."

"Will you repeat them?" she asked.

"First, that you swear most perfect secrecy; that you give up the past and all it holds—memories, associations, friends, everything—and begin a life entirely fresh and new."

"I promise that," she said.

"I am well pleased," said Mr. Rodway. "I can not tell you how pleased. I think you have acted with the most perfect good sense. I will write to the marquis at once. Now, may I suggest a few things to you?"

"I shall be pleased to listen," she said.

A new manner had come to her, now that she had shaken off the old ties—a pride that made her doubly charming.

"You are looking very ill," he said. "I do not ask what has made you suffer, but no one could see you without thinking that you had suffered."

"It is not easy to leave one's home, never to see it again," she answered.

He was keen enough to understand most of what had passed. He said to himself that she would suffer more in a few days' time, when the reaction came, than she did now that she had the excitement and prospect of novelty. It would never do for that reaction to take place during the first days she was under her uncle's roof; better have it all over before she went there. So he answered her gently:

"I am sure it has troubled you. Leaving home, no matter how humble it may be, is always hard. I wish with all my heart it had been otherwise; but your home is sacrificed to the marquis's pride."

She bowed. She made him no answer. What should he know of what she had given up—of the passionate tears and kisses?

"Will you give me your attention for a few minutes?" he said.

And Laure looked steadily at him.

CHAPTER X.

THE FIRST PANGS OF REMORSE.

"I SHOULD suggest first of all," said Mr. Rodway, "that you do not go to Fernholme Abbey for the next week or two. Shall I have your pardon if I speak quite plainly?"

His great deference made her courteous.

"I shall be pleased," she answered him; "you see that I am quite friendless."

"Thank you. I have told you that the marquis is a proud man; perhaps no man living is a more complete and thorough aristocrat than he. The sight of a lady's hand reddened or coarsened by work would horrify him as would ill-fitting dresses or ungainly shoes."

She blushed crimson. He had to watch that beautiful face narrowly, lest he should offend her.

"I was thinking," he continued, "that if you went to Westburn, a pretty and fashionable watering-place on the southern coast, it would be the best thing possible for you. You would have time to get over your very natural sorrow at leaving home; you would have time to recruit your health; you could pay some attention to those little details that make a lady so charming." He paused for a moment, then continued: "I am speaking entirely in your own interests. I should wish the marquis's first impression of you to be highly favorable."

"So should I," interrupted Laure.

Mr. Rodway bowed.

"Then on that one point we are agreed," he continued. "If you will permit me the honor, I shall be only too delighted to advance you any sum of money you may think fit for the purchase of all the needful things you may require."

Again she blushed crimson. He hastened to add:

"Pray do not think this would lay you under any obligation to me; it is a mere business form. You can give me an acknowledgment, which the marquis will settle. Any other person in my place would make the same offer; any person in yours would accept it."

"You are quite sure?" she said, earnestly—so earnestly that he smiled.

He began to see how proud a soul inhabited this beautiful body.

"I am sure. I must remind you that I am but your servant, and that all I have is at your service. Shall we arrange this at once? Shall I advance you one hundred pounds?"

She looked up at him in such utter wonder that he laughed aloud.

"One hundred pounds," she said. "Why, I should not spend as much as that on dress in a whole life-time."

"Pardon me," he said, "if I venture to predict that in a short time you will give as much as that for one single dress."

"One hundred pounds!" she repeated, wondering what Owen would say if he heard it—what he would think of

such fearful extravagance. Then she looked helplessly into the agent's face.

"What should I buy with one hundred pounds?" she cried.

A sudden longing came to her. If she could but send fifty of it to Owen to buy books. She had heard him longing for books, and saying that it would cost him fifty pounds to buy them, and that sum he should never be able to afford. She looked up at Mr. Rodway with such a sudden brightening of her face, such a light in her eyes, that he was startled out of his cool, steady calm.

"What is it?" he asked, hurriedly.

"If I take the hundred pounds, may I send fifty of it away?" she asked.

"You will not be able to spare it; you have evidently no idea at all of what you will require. If you want fifty or a hundred more you can have it with the greatest pleasure."

"Will any one say anything?" she asked, never dreaming that such a sum of money could be looked on with impunity.

He smiled.

"I can undertake to answer that the only wonder expressed will be why you did not take more. Would you mind telling me—I ask the question with all deference—would you mind telling me for whom you require or would like the money?"

"For a friend I have left," she answered.

"You remember the conditions? You must not write to any friend. You have given them all up—you have finished with that past life."

She was silent, then he said:

"Of course, if it be any one whom you really wish to help, and it can be done anonymously, that will be all right."

"I will do it so."

She looked earnestly at him.

"You can not tell," she said, "how happy that fifty pounds will make me."

So it was settled. He gave her one hundred for her own use, and a bank-note for fifty; then, looking at his watch, he said:

"It would be more prudent for us to start for Westburn

to-night, I think. It does not seem safe for me to remain in this neighborhood with you. If we leave here by six, we shall reach Westburn by eleven."

She was willing. She forgot everything just then in the pleasure of sending Owen fifty pounds. She had deliberately left him; she had given him the wound of his life; she had plunged the sharpest sword of sorrow in his heart; and yet she was almost happy in the prospect of being able to send him money.

She busied herself with it; she had pens, ink and paper brought to her. She wrote in a stiff round hand, that did not even in the faintest degree resemble her writing.

"A great admirer of Owen Roden's—one who believes in his talents, and sees a bright future for him—sends him fifty pounds, that he may purchase proper books for study. The same gentleman will send again and again, and wishes Owen Roden all the prosperity he deserves."

She kissed the little flimsy bank-note over again and again, because his fingers must touch it; then she sealed and addressed it.

She would post it at one of the near stations where the train passed, and he would never have any clew; he would never know that it came from her. It seemed to give her some little ease and comfort; she tried to think of poor Owen's joy when he should find the money, rather than of his anguish at losing her. She did not foresee how the bank-note would lie unnoticed on the floor of his little cottage while he so vainly sought her.

Then Mr. Rodway, who seemed determined that she should have no time for melancholy thoughts, insisted on a delicious dinner. He would not listen to her excuses; she must eat, she must drink, or she would be ill. She was compelled to take something, and when that was over it was time to go to the station.

For the first time in her life Laure traveled in a first-class carriage with every appliance of luxury. Mr. Rodway bought her books and papers; he talked to her, he did everything in his power to make her cheerful, for he saw the look that began to come in her eyes.

"She will have to suffer awfully," he said to himself; "she is proud and ambitious, but she is tender of heart. Whoever it is that she has left behind her there, the wrench

is a great one; her grief will be like a thunder-storm, the longer it is coming the worse it will be."

He saw her give the guard the letter to post, but he asked no questions when Laure sunk back in the carriage. While she held that letter in her hand it seemed that she had some little link binding her to Owen; now that it was gone, there was a terrible dreary blank, so terrible. The noise of the wheels, the shrill scream of the engine, the hissing of the steam, all made a deadly medley in her ears; above all she heard Owen's voice, and it was always saying:

"I would follow you to the end of the world and die humbly at your feet."

Once she half slept, and started suddenly, with a terrible cry:

"Owen, Owen, I dreamed that I had left you," she said.

She looked round with frightened eyes; there was the stranger, and the lamp burning, the empty seats—but no Owen.

Mr. Rodway never gave the least sign of having heard her; he was a wise man, and he had five thousand pounds to make.

But when the train reached Westburn station he was very kind to her; he drove to the best hotel, and ordered the best room for her. He looked at the white face, and the worn, sorrowful eyes.

"I have done the wisest thing I ever did in my life, in bringing her here first," he said to himself. "There would have been a terrible fiasco if we had gone to Fernholme."

"Take some advice from an elderly gentleman, Miss Knowles," he said; "let me persuade you to have a tumbler of white wine whey."

She turned impatiently from him.

"I will not take any more wine," she said. "I do not like it, it makes me feel stupid."

"The best advice that I can give you is to stupefy yourself," he said.

"I only want to be alone. I shall be better alone," she answered, turning from him, with a great tearless sob. "I can only feel that unless I am alone soon I shall die."

He was hard and strong, with a cold heart and a hard

nature, but he left her with tears in his eyes. He fain would have undone what he had done, but he wanted the five thousand pounds.

It had come. She fell to the floor of the beautiful and spacious chamber where they had taken her. It seemed to her as though her soul was leaving her body. She flung the money far from her. She would not touch it. Perish all money, all wealth; she wanted Owen.

Owen, who loved her; Owen, whose strong arms sheltered her; Owen, whose grand, noble heart was always her own. She lay on the floor, with her face buried in her hands, crying for him as she never cried again in her life, calling him by every loving name; Owen, her love, her husband, her all. She must go back to him; she had been mad to leave him; she must go back. She could not live away from him; this mad passion of grief was killing her. It seemed to her as though great fiery fangs were fastened in her throat, as though great, hot hands were tearing her chest. If that was sorrow, then she could bear no more of it, she must go back to Owen.

On the morrow. He would hardly have time to miss her. She would go back on the morrow. She fell asleep with the words on her lips—the morrow—the day that never comes.

CHAPTER XI.

VANITY'S VICTIM.

It was no surprise in the morning following to Mr. Rodway to be told that the lady, Miss Knowles, was ill and quite unable to get up. He looked very sorry when the smart chamber-maid gave him the intelligence, although he had quite expected it. He enlisted the sympathy of the landlady and the servants in her behalf by saying that she had been in great trouble lately, and had not quite recovered; he begged that she might have every attention and no expense spared.

He went out and purchased ripe, luscious fruit, fine old wine, and sent them to her—she never even looked at them. More than once he congratulated himself on his forethought, saying it was well that he had not taken her to Fernholme first.

Laure never listened to any of the kindly messages he

sent; she lay with her face turned to the wall—dumb with the passionate anguish that could find no vent, sullen with the greatness of her own despair. Have you, who read this, ever known the pain of a great loss? have you lost one who was so dear and so near to you that life seemed all ended when the presence faded? Do you remember the sharp pain that at first seemed to deaden you, then the silent, dazed sensation, followed by the terrible awakening, the physical anguish, that was so difficult to bear, the sorrow that had been repressed, coming uppermost, fighting its way, and making such a terrible havoc as it gained ground? If so you can pity this woman who in addition to the pain of her loss had the agony of knowing what her husband suffered.

She slept at first the heavy sleep of exhaustion—blessed sleep that comes to us and lightens our sorrows; then the sun shone in her room and woke her; she had forgotten it all in that deep sleep; the warm, bright rays touched her, and in those half-deceiving moments she was by Owen's side, the song of the birds in her ears, her daily duties before her. It came to her with a sudden, terrible pain that she had left Owen forever and was never to see him again. Slowly as the tide creeps over the land, the whole force and knowledge of what she had done crept over her, and she cried aloud in her despair.

She must go back to him, never mind what it cost her, no matter how much the marquis might need her, still less matter about Mr. Rodway and his five thousand pounds. She could not live with that terrible pain in her heart, stopping her breath, and choking her.

"Owen, Owen!" she cried aloud.

She must go back to him without loss of time, without one hour's delay. She does not think of what he has suffered, of what the night, so awful in its anguish to her, had been to him. She must go, ah, even before the sun rose higher in the heavens. He loved her so dearly he would forgive her at once; she would fling her arms round his neck, and keep them there clasped tightly until he kissed her and promised to forget it. She was impatient to be gone; she would leave the hundred pounds for Mr. Rodway, and she would send the fifty. Oh, to be away from here, from the coil that seemed wound round her, to be once more in the little cottage by Owen's side.

"Owen, Owen!" she called aloud in her anguish. How should she live until she was with him again. She tried to rise but the shock had been too great for her. In her short, simple life, she had known what it was to suffer from hunger, from cold and thirst; she had known physical pain, but never mental; it was new to her, this anguish which seemed to devour her, to prostrate her; she could not stand, the strength of her limbs failed, a great darkness came over her eyes, and she fell with a low cry.

She could not stand; it was in vain she tried; there was nothing for it but to ring for aid.

She lay all day unable to move, conscious only of one supreme longing, and it was to go away, to find herself with Owen again, never, oh, never, while life lasted to leave him again.

Mr. Rodway was most anxious, most solicitous; he sent constantly to make inquiries about her; no one but himself knew his anxiety, yet he trusted to the chapter of accidents, trusted to his own marvelous diplomacy, to his own skill and tact.

He was startled on the morning following when she came suddenly into the little sitting-room. He hardly recognized her. The comparison that came first to his mind was that of a flower blighted by the frost. In twenty-four hours she seemed to have lost all her beauty and coloring. Her face was white and drawn, with great, dark shadows round the eyes and great lines of pain round the lips; her eyes were shadowed as with some great anguish. She held out her white, trembling hands to him.

"Do not be angry with me," she said, "I must go back."

He was far too wise a man to attempt to oppose her.

"You shall please yourself, my dear Miss Knowles," he said. "I am grieved to see you look so ill."

He made her sit down on the little couch; he saw that she trembled violently.

"I will be quite firm in one thing," he said; "I will not hear one word until you have eaten some breakfast with me; if you will promise me to do that I will help you in any way you will."

She looked at him with great, wistful eyes.

"I can not eat," she said; "it is cruel to ask me."

"Then I must be cruel, for I shall insist on doing it. I

know that you took nothing yesterday—I made inquiries; you will not be strong enough even to return, unless you will try. I will help you in any way you like best if you will but promise me that you will join me in that."

"I will try," she said; "you will let me go home, back to my—to—to Rosethorpe, will you not?"

"My dear Miss Knowles, I am your servant, not your master," he replied; "I will do anything you wish, if you will but take some breakfast."

So, to please him, and because the action seemed to bring her nearer to Owen, she eat some bread and drank some tea; it did her good, she looked stronger and better after it.

"Now we will talk," he said, gently. "You want to go back again, you do not feel equal to going through with it."

"I do not; I must return," she said.

"You have left some friend, a friend probably from whom you do not wish to be parted."

"Yes, that is it," she said, in a low voice; "I must go back."

"Very well, I can not object; you have the most perfect right to please yourself; but you will allow me, I am sure, to advise you."

"Yes," she answered, briefly.

"Do not go to-day, wait until to-morrow, or the day after; you are not indeed fit for travel. One or two days can not matter much, as you have decided on going. Take my advice, rest here to-day, go to-morrow, if you feel better, if not, wait until the next day."

"If you really wish it," she said; "but I would rather go at once; still I will wait until to-morrow."

"You will act wisely. And now, as you have never seen the sea, I presume, we will drive down to the beach and the first breath of the salt breeze will do you good."

She did not object; as well that as anything else; no matter how the time passed until she was with Owen again. Mr. Rodway ordered a carriage, and they drove gently down to the sea. Ah, that was wonderful, that great, wide sheet of water; it was so wonderful that it took her breath away and froze the words on her lips; so wonderful that she could not take her eyes from it, and her face grew even whiter with emotion.

He dismissed the carriage, and helped her to walk on the sands. They sat down on a great, dry stone, and she, with the delight of a child, watched the great waves roll in. Then, slowly the sea-breeze brought the color back to her face—the loveliest, daintiest bloom; it brought the light to her eyes, the rose-hue to her lips; it seemed to blow away the lines of pain—it made her quite a different creature. And again the astue agent congratulated himself on his wisdom.

"The world is full of such beautiful sights," he said; "it is sad that one's life has to be spent in small places, without a chance of travel. Shall we walk down to the water's edge? You will like to take some of this trailing sea-weed home with you."

They spent some hours very happily down on the beach; then he drove her past the great, white cliffs and over the heathery downs. Laure was charmed, but she did not forget Owen. Both she and Mr. Rodway talked as though her going home was a settled thing.

"You are much better," he said to her at night; "one more day by the sea, and you will be quite well. You had better stay over to-morrow."

She was willing; she longed to see the marvelous waters once again before she left them forever.

"I have been thinking," said Mr. Rodway, "that as you have the money, you may as well spend some of it. You would like to visit the shops, and purchase some suitable dresses; I do not like to see you disguised in these."

"But the money is yours," she said, "not mine. I am going back home."

"Certainly. Still I can arrange that matter. Pray do as I ask you; come with me to-morrow and spend the money. If you will forgive my saying so, I am most anxious to see the great change that dress will make in you."

He had baited his trap well; it was hardly to be expected that a girl who had never had one shilling for herself could resist the temptation to spend one hundred pounds; that a beautiful woman, whose beauty had been disguised by dress, could resist the temptation of seeing how she would look in a dress that suited her.

She spent the greater part of the next day in visiting the different shops. She smiled when Mr. Rodway insisted on buying two large traveling-trunks.

"You must have something that will hold all your purchases," he said.

"These trunks would not go in at the door of my litte home," she said; but he did not seem to hear the objection.

On that day she thought less of Owen. She had for the first time in her life the great pleasure of surrounding herself with beautiful things.

She put on one of the new dresses to dine with Mr. Rodway. She did not know herself; it was only an elegantly made black silk, but it completely changed her. It showed the graceful lines of her perfect figure; the fine white lace was not so white as the beautiful neck it encircled; she looked like a young princess. She read wonder and admiration in the agent's face, she read it in the increased deference of his manner, in the redoubled respect of the servants. When she went out the next day in a daintily made Parisian bonnet and costume, she saw that people stopped in the streets and looked after her. Mr. Rodway smiled in his quiet way.

"I knew that you would make a great sensation, Miss Knowles," he said. "I have been besieged with petitions for introductions to you. If you had been going into the great world, you would soon have had it at your feet."

The third day she said little of going home; he had baited his trap well. He had aroused and brought into full life her pride and ambition.

It is never pleasant to trace the downfall of a noble nature, or to tell how one with all the elements of nobility goes wrong. Mr. Rodway was a wise man; he interested her so completely in the vanities of dress and fashion, in the wonder of her own fair loveliness, in the beautiful scenery, in the thousand and one charms of life that gradually, slowly, surely the change came.

It were too sad a story to trace day by day, to tell how the great sorrow died away, how the passionate anguish grew less, how the aching heart grew brighter. Mr. Rodway was a wise man full of tact and diplomacy; there was no subtle influence which could touch or reach a woman's heart that he neglected, and the result was attained. Laure remained at Westburn a fortnight, during which time she completely recovered her brilliant beauty and dainty bloom.

She never went back to Owen, and Mr. Rodway won his five thousand pounds.

More than once that astute gentleman smiled to himself and said:

"I did a wise thing in bringing her here; if I had taken her to Fernholme she would never have stayed, and I should have lost—not won."

CHAPTER XII.

THE WIFE'S LIE.

FERNHOLME ABBEY had long been one of the show places in England. It was built originally as an abbey, then it became a fortress, after which one of the Tudor kings, admiring the situation, seized it and made it into a summer residence; the next king bestowed it on his reigning favorite; it descended to her sons, until one more profligate and spendthrift than the rest, sold it; then it was purchased by a wealthy peer, who added to it and enlarged it. It was worthy of note that many different possessors added to it, beautified it, improved and altered it according to his own particular taste, so that it gradually became one of the most picturesque masses of building in England. It had a beauty and irregularity quite its own.

The present owner, the Marquis de Bourdon, had, to use his own expression, simply refined it. The interior was transformed into what was really a palace of art; he added picture-galleries and great oriel windows, stained glass, ferneries, conservatories, fountains; he did not leave one square inch of the whole vast building unbeautified; his pictures were the wonder of half England, his statues spoken of everywhere, his flowers the wonder of all who saw them. He had collected the ancient pictures that had belonged to the De Bourdons; he had given fabulous sums for them, and for every relic of his ancient house—they formed the principal ornaments of Fernholme. In the picture-gallery the fair faces of coquettish French women, who had ruled kingdoms and kings, shone on the wall, dark faces of Norman rulers, stern faces of the De Bourdons who had faced death and smiled at it.

It was no wonder that artists and poets all sought Fernholme; it was a massive poem in itself; every age was rep-

resented there, from the most barbarous to the most luxurious.

On this warm, bright day in July, the marquis was pacing up and down his library, evidently agitated and ill at ease. He had been a handsome man in his youth, and now retained a magnificent presence. He had a tall, well-built figure, erect and martial in its carriage—full of dignity that he never lost; he might have been some grand Norman king, weighed down by cares of state. The fine, patrician face had deep lines of care; the eloquent eyes were dim; the hair, so silken and luxurious, was white as snow.

There was something grand and majestic about him, something imperial in his gestures; he looked like a man who had swayed thousands by one wave of his white hand. He could never be mistaken for anything but an aristocrat; if he had called himself peasant, or *parvenu*, every one would have laughed at him; he was a "gentleman born"—refined, sensitive, brave and honorable—he could never have been anything else.

His life had been full of strange changes. Born of a peasant mother, his father, the ruined peer, had done but little for him. As a child, he had loved his father, who had trusted him and him alone with the secret of his birth and title.

"Go back to France, Auguste," the old marquis would say; "win back name and fame—it is to be done, if you will do it."

There was no sympathy between the peasant mother and her son; he had been many years in France when he heard of the birth of the little sister whom he had never seen. He did not return even when his father died, for he was serving then in Algiers, and could not leave.

After years of study and toil, of stirring adventure and martial valor—after making for himself a name known all over France—he was, by great good fortune, enabled to render an invaluable service to the ruler of France, and his reward was great.

His title and estates were restored to him, with a large sum of money as compensation. But the soldier was sick at heart, he saw bribery and corruption, he saw such ferment and irritation in the great masses of the people, he foresaw such disasters that his heart failed him; he saw for certain that if he remained there a change of rulers would

come, and he would lose all that he had gained. He sold all his estates except the Château de Bourdon, from which he took his name, and came to England; it seemed to him that he could serve his country better at a distance from her than with her.

Fortune lavished favors on him, and his wealth seemed to multiply; he married a rich heiress, who died, leaving him two children, and by a strange fatality they died as soon as they came of age. He had never forgotten the existence of the sister whom he had not seen, but every effort he had made was quite useless. He went down himself to his birth-place, and heard how the handsome, vigorous peasant-mother had died, but no one knew anything of Augusta; she had left home, and was married—that was the most he could learn. He petitioned the Secretary of State for permission to remove the remains of his mother and father to Fernholme, where a handsome mausoleum was erected to receive them. Then he looked round for the cleveerst man he could find, to place the search in his hands.

Hitherto the years had passed and had brought with them no success, but this morning a letter had arrived which had taken from him his self-possession. It was but brief.

"My lord," it ran, "I have been successful. I have said nothing lest at the last there should be a disappointment. This evening I bring to Fernholme your lost niece, Miss Laure Knowles, and with her I bring every possible proof of her identity that can be required.

"I am your lordship's obedient servant,

"A. Rodway."

Since the reading of that letter little peace had come to the lord of Fernholme. He was proud, ambitious, sensitive and refined. He longed with all his heart that Rodway had said something about his niece, had told him whether she was refined, presentable or what. Yet he felt that if his agent had presumed to say anything of the kind he should never forgive him.

He was restless and anxious; he began to question himself as to whether, after all, he had done a wise thing.

His mother was a peasant; what if to the women of his race had been transmitted peasant features and that innate vulgarity which nothing can possibly eradicate? If there

came to him some tall, angular girl, with coarse, handsome, peasant features, red hands and an incurable accent, what could he do? Ever introduce such a one to the world as Mlle. de Bourdon he could not—would not; he had rather leave his vast fortune to charity, and let the ancient name die. He wished now that he had taken the precaution of seeing his niece before she was brought home to him.

He had said nothing in the household—he would not; for if she were what he feared, she could be no heiress of his, and there would be time enough for all that when he saw her. He was so anxious and agitated that when the bell rang, and he knew she had arrived, he trembled, and then he laughed at himself.

"I have faced a whole regiment with fixed bayonets," he said—"I have faced death and danger, shall I tremble before a girl? Verily I forget that I am a soldier."

Yet, despite his brave words, it required all his courage to enter the drawing-room where they awaited him. Never, until his dying day, will he forget the relief he felt when he saw before him a tall slender girl, with a beautiful face and graceful figure, exquisitely dressed and looking lovely as a dream. His first sensation was one of intense relief, his second one of intense pleasure. He looked at the agent.

"Is this my niece?" he asked, and his voice was broken with emotion.

"This is Miss Knowles," said Mr. Rodway.

He held out his hands to her and in his courtly fashion kissed her on both sides of the face.

"I never saw your mother—my only sister," he said; "but you are like her, I am sure. Welcome to my home and my heart."

Then he stood quite silent for some minutes, watching the matchless beauty of that sweet, young face, the loveliness of the whole figure.

"I can not say how welcome you are to me, Laure," he said. "I have sought you for years; now I am repaid. You come to me as daughter, niece, heiress, the only living creature whose hand I can clasp as one of my own. How old are you, Laure?" he asked.

She looked up at him, timidly, this handsome, courtly man, so majestic and dignified.

"I am eighteen," she answered.

"The age of poetry," he said. "Eighteen, and life all before you. And you—you are not married, Laure?"

She was quite silent for one minute, and the radiance of her beauty seemed to fall from her face. Then, in a voice hard and cold, she answered:

"No, I am not married, uncle."

"I am so pleased, so delighted, my niece. The sight of you has made me feel quite young again."

It seemed to her that another voice besides his was speaking, and that it said:

"I should follow you like a dog to the world's end, and die humbly at your feet."

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT WAS IT THE PRICE OF?

LAURE had seen little enough of what is called life; she had seen so few people, mixed so little in any kind of society, that it was wonderful how she should be able to form any kind of estimate or judgment, yet she was wonderfully struck with the fine, courteous, chivalrous manner of the marquis. There was the slightest possible shade of difference between his manner to Mr. Rodway and to herself; so slight that none but an acute observer would have noticed it, yet marked enough to show the difference he made between his niece and his employé. He was grand seigneur from head to foot; his words were courtly, his actions courtly, with an innate grace and refinement that delighted Laure.

After a time he said:

"While my niece arranges her toilet, we will settle our little business matters, Mr. Rodway."

A maid was summoned who was to show Laure her rooms, and the two gentlemen went to the library. Laure knew then that he was to receive the reward, five thousand pounds. What was it the price of? A woman's love and honor—a woman's heart and life. This thought crossed her mind as she followed the maid through the long corridors and up the broad staircase—just crossed her mind, but did not linger there, there was no room for it. She had never dreamed of anything half so beautiful as this old Abbey. Frome Castle, Lord Cardin's home, was nothing to be com-

pared to it, and that had always seemed to her a dream of delight.

Here on the beautifully tinted walls, hung priceless pictures; from between the folds of luxurious hangings gleamed costly statues, superb jardinières filled with choicest flowers; carpets so thick and soft that no step could be heard on them—luxury and magnificence abounded. When she entered the superb apartments the marquis in his own mind intended for her, her wonder was still more increased. Once at Frome Castle, when Lady Cardin was away from home, as a very great favor one of the maids had shown her my lady's chamber, but this was far more magnificent. The tall mirrors, the pictures, the beautiful furniture, the china and silver, the exquisite Bohemian glass on the toilet table, the thousand and one ornaments, all impressed her.

She stood looking at them full of wonder. Was this superb room really for her? The long French windows opened on to iron balconies that were filled with flowers; the view from them over the park and the river was beautiful —and the price a woman's honor and a man's heart.

She would soon forget that, and all would be well. While the maid assisted her, Laure's mind was filled with a most uncomfortable degree of wonder. When should she understand the names, much less the use of all these silver-stopped bottles and different things to which her maid seemed quite accustomed?—when should she be as much at home in this magnificent room as she had been in the little chamber where the roses peeped in at the window and the birds sung in the eaves?

Meanwhile the marquis and the agent stood looking at each other.

"I hope, my lord," said Mr. Rodway, "that you are pleased."

"Pleased," cried the marquis; "I am more than pleased —I am delighted. I must confess, Rodway, that the reality far exceeds all my anticipations. I had never hoped to see anything so beautiful and graceful."

"I hold myself a very fortunate man, my lord," said the agent.

"And I hold myself a very happy one," said the marquis, with infinite grace. Then, raising his face, he looked intently at his employé.

"Was it much trouble to her—did she seem to grieve over leaving home?" he asked.

"No, not more than might have been foreseen. She had not many friends," was the reply.

"With whom was she living?" he asked. "Was she alone?"

"She lived in a little cottage, quite alone, to the best of my belief. I saw no one there but herself."

"Of course, Rodway, you observed all due caution," said the marquis.

"I was cautious, my lord, as even you could have wished me to be," was the reply.

Still the keen, clear eyes were fixed on his face, as though the marquis would read his very soul.

"I need hardly ask the question. Is she married, Rodway?"

"Certainly not, my lord. I asked the same question the first time I saw her, and was answered at once."

"I do not like asking questions which would better become an inquisitor than a gentleman," he continued, "but I am desirous of understanding the proper state of things. Does she—did she, my niece, love or care for any one—in plain language, had she any lover?"

"No; I am perfectly certain of that," was the quiet reply. "I am quite convinced that she had no lover."

"I am well pleased to hear it; once more let me express my gratitude to you. You have well earned your reward; let me add also that I consider myself so deeply indebted to you that while I live you need never want a friend. Now for our settlement."

The detective's face grew very pale. This was the decisive moment for him; once let him hold the check in his hands and he could laugh at fate. He trembled as the marquis went to his writing-desk; his lips quivered. How hard he had worked for that moment; how much depended on it, and the least interruption might be fatal.

None came. A great tearless sob of relief rose to his lips as he saw the marquis sign his name; then he came to him and presented the check.

"With it let me give you my earnest thanks," said the marquis, and at last Mr. Rodway held the five thousand pounds safe.

Something of remorse and sorrow mingled with his happiness, but he quickly drove that feeling away.

"I have done the best for her that could be done," he said to himself.

He noticed, even in the tumult of his thoughts, that the Marquis de Bourdon did not offer to touch his hand. That fine, white hand, with the filbert-shaped nails, with the one costly diamond ring, was not held out to him.

Then he took a glass of madeira with his lordship, and their interview was ended. He had said good-bye to Laure, now he had made his adieu to the marquis, and had left the Abbey.

When the marquis returned to the drawing-room, it was to find his beautiful niece there before him. He went to her and kissed her white brow.

"I could not say much to you before that person," he said. "I am so pleased to see you, Laure; you and I are left alone, the only two remaining of what was once a large and flourishing family; we must do our best for its welfare, for its honor. I have been very lonely all these years; I am glad to have found you. You must be daughter and niece in one to me."

He looked half sadly at her.

"You are very charming, Laure—very beautiful," he said. "I wish I had seen Augusta, your mother. Are you like her, I wonder? You have the true Bourdon face—refined and sweet."

"I am glad that you are pleased with me, uncle," she said.

"Your voice, too, is sweet and well modulated; I like the tone. A nice voice, well trained and silvery, is a great thing in a lady." Then he took both her hands in his, and looked at them. "Bon sang ne peut monter," he said; "good blood will show itself. Your hands are beautiful, Laure; had they been coarse or red, even a lovely face would hardly have carried you through. Fine, little hands, but they are still somewhat hard. You have worked, Laure, have you not?"

"I have done nothing else," she said; "I have had to live by hard work."

"Poor child," he said, "how terrible it is. Yet I have done my best; for years I have searched for you. Your

poor mother left no trace. You see it was almost impossible to find you."

The beautiful face clouded. The marquis continued:

"I own to you frankly that I had many misgivings, Laure. I knew that of course your poor mother had married in what she thought her own class, and that it was a chance if, after all, you took after the aristocratic or the plebeian side. Now I am quite content; my beautiful niece might be a princess in her own right. Laure, there is one thing more on which I congratulate myself. I am so glad, so pleased, so well content that you are not married."

He did not see that her face grew white, even to the sweet, proud lips, and the bright eyes fell. He thought she was shy and embarrassed.

"I should have been dreadfully distressed had you unfortunately been married," he continued; "indeed I gave instructions to Mr. Rodway if that were the case, to let the matter drop through."

She found courage sufficient to raise her eyes and ask:

"Why?"

"Because my whole heart has grown sick of love marriages," he said. "They have been the bane of our race. I have all honor and reverence for my own mother, although she was peasant-born; but if my father had married in his own sphere, it would have been better for him. I resolved that I would have no more—in time our race would deteriorate. I told my agent if ever he found you, and found you married, to let the whole affair fall through, and I can not tell you how delighted I am that my dear niece is free. Now all the glories of the De Bourdons may return, all the ancient luster of the race revive; there need be no limit to my ambition or to yours. I am so pleased, so thankful that you are free. Tell me just one thing, Laure—I beg you to pardon me that I ask the question—but I wish to understand, have you left a lover in this country home of yours?"

She looked at the noble, kindly face.

"A lover, uncle?" she answered, slowly; "no, I have not."

"That is well. I should not have liked to think that you were unhappy. You have brought your fancy, your affections, your heart, quite free, Laure?"

"Quite free," she answered.

"Nothing could be better. I prophesy for you now the brightest future of any girl in England. You are not twenty years old yet, Laure?"

"No," she said, "I am just eighteen."

Then, after a few more kindly words, he left her, and Laure returned to her beautiful room to sleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNPARDONABLE SIN.

THE morning rose bright and beautiful. Laure awoke with the sun; she smiled to herself as she remembered how she had thought the room at the sea-side hotel all that was most grand—this luxurious apartment so far eclipsed it, that her thoughts flew to the little chamber, with the flowers peeping in at the window, and the birds singing in the eaves.

"I must forget that," she said; "if I remember it or him, all my life will be wretched."

Yet more than once her thoughts went back to the tall, strong figure, and the honest, kindly, true face. The maid that helped her dress thought her quiet and reserved. Laura looked very lovely in a morning dress of white muslin and lace, her golden brown hair simply arranged and tied back in waving luxuriance, no art could have enhanced her wonderful beauty as did this simple elegance.

The marquis was delighted when he saw her.

"This simple elegance is charming, Laure. You have the true ideas of a lady over dress, I am delighted to see. When we have taken breakfast, you and I have a few little matters which we must discuss."

Breakfast was laid in a bright sunny room, the delicate china, the shining silver, the flowers on the table, the fine damask, the *recherché* little dishes pleased Laure. There was the prettiest little service for her use; the marquis preferred claret and fruit. He sat opposite to Laure, and while he seemed to be talking carelessly to her, he was watching keenly how she conducted herself. Her instinct was perfect; he saw that she had the inbred, innate refinement; but her manners were by no means perfect. She was at a loss when to use her knife or her fork; he saw, and that comforted him, that she was quick to imitate, that she

was one of those gifted women who seem instinctively to fall into the ways and the fashions of the people with whom they associate; he had no fear but that she would quickly adapt herself to the habits and manners of the best society. Then, when breakfast was over, he asked her to walk through the grounds with him, he had much to say to her. They walked some little distance, then in the grand old avenue of limes he asked her to sit and rest while she listened to his plans. He did not wish just yet to introduce her to the world, or even to his own household as his niece and his heiress.

"There are many reasons, Laure," he said. "I do not wish any one to know that you have been living in England. I shall go to France, and bring you back with me; every one will believe I have brought you direct from there. I do not want any one to know that you have lived in poverty and obscurity in England. It would tell against you, Laure, in the race I want you to win."

"I understand," she said, gravely.

"Then you see, Laure, it would be necessary for you to live some time in France, that you might learn to speak French; besides which I know you will not be pained if I tell you that you have much to learn, much to unlearn; that you will want much training before you go into society."

"I quite expected it," she said, quietly.

"Then, in these days," he continued, "no one can be considered educated who has not traveled. You must visit Italy, Switzerland, Germany—all places of note; you must see for yourself the great pictures of the world, the masterpieces of art; you must educate yourself also by reading and talking."

"I will do my best," she answered.

Then he told her all that in his own mind he had arranged to do.

"You are still so young," he said, "that you can well spare two years in study; then, when we return, I shall introduce you into the great world as my niece and heiress. Do you like the plan I have suggested, Laure?"

She told him yes, that she liked it very much. Then he explained to her that, as his niece, she was not, perhaps, strictly entitled to the title of lady, but, as his adopted daughter and heiress, he should prefer that she used it, and

she was to be known henceforth as Lady Laure de Bourdon. Her face flushed when she heard it. The marquis smiled complacently over the name.

"It is very pretty, very musical," he said. "Lady Laure de Bourdon. What a fortunate thing it was that your mother called you Laure. How was it?"

"She had often heard her father say that he admired that name," she answered.

"Yes, it has been much used in our family. Now, Laure, I will show you the interior of the Abbey. I will introduce you to some of the members of your family on canvas. Unfortunately many of our finest family portraits were destroyed during the revolution, but I managed to secure some; others I have purchased at any cost. You will like to see them."

"I should like it better than anything," she said.

"That is right. A taste for painting, and indeed for all the fine arts runs in our family. I am glad to see that you have it."

They re-entered the house, and in his courtly, gallant fashion the marquis escorted her to the gallery, where the family portraits were all arranged in due order. He showed her a dark-faced De Bourdon, who had been prime minister to one of the kings of France; one who had been the bravest marshal in the land where all soldiers are brave; one who had saved a king's life by taking for himself a murderer's blow aimed at the king—brave men and true, all of them, with the great virtues and the great vices that belong to strong characters.

Then he showed her the portraits of beautiful women. Some were fair, some dark. He smiled as he looked at them.

"All the women born of our race," he said, "have been famous for their loveliness. Look at La Belle Isabelle; she was said to be the fairest woman in all France. This one, La Marquise Honoré, was left a widow at the age of twenty-one, and never remarried; she devoted herself to bringing up her children, and was known as La Belle et Bonne Dame."

He passed without speaking a beautiful, golden-haired woman, whose white neck was encircled by rich sapphires. Laure looked with great admiration at the beautiful, sparkling face.

"Uncle," she asked, "who is this?"

He looked up.

"I do not care to tell you about her," he said.

"Do tell me. She is so beautiful. I like the face so much."

"Do not say that, Laure. It is a beautiful face, but not a good one; surely you can see that; perhaps it would be better for me to tell you. She was called 'La belle Gabrielle,' but she ran away from her husband, left him, and in all the long line of women belonging to our race, she is the only one on whom that stain rests."

He did not see how the young face before him had suddenly grown deadly pale.

"We forgive much to men," he said, "perhaps unjustly so, but little to women. La belle Gabrielle has been a blot on the De Bourdons; her name is held in detestation. I have regretted more than once that I brought her portrait with me, yet it is a lovely picture."

"Why did she leave her husband?" asked Lady Laure, in a low voice.

"Because she was false of heart. Do not talk about her, Laure; that is the one crime I would never forgive in a woman; any treachery, any baseness but that. Why, Laure, you are trembling; have I tired you, or frightened you?"

"Neither," she said, but her face had grown white, even to the lips; her limbs trembled, her lips quivered. The marquis was alarm. He took her hastily to a chair and made her sit down.

"I am quite sure that you are ill, Laure," he said.

"I am not indeed, uncle. I think it is the rich odor of all these flowers; see, I am quite well now. Tell me, for I am very anxious to hear, tell me about the other ladies."

"Another time," he said; "I must remember that all these things are quite new to you, and you must naturally feel some emotion. I shall take you to the drawing-room, where you must rest, and I must remember that you have the fine sensitiveness that belongs by right to the illustrious."

He took her back to the beautiful drawing-room and made her rest on the couch; he placed a book in her hand and left her.

But she could not read, her heart was on fire. If he

knew, this proud, refined nobleman—if he knew the one crime he could never forgive—falsity in women—if he knew what she had done, how quickly would all this grandeur fade from her; how soon would he dismiss her with slighting words, for he never forgave the sin.

How grand and luxurious it was, all this new life of hers; how grand it would be in the future, when she should be mistress of all his wealth; how wonderful her story was, like one read in a book—Lady Laure de Bourdon!

Then she said to herself that she must be very careful lest by any means this guarded secret of hers should come to light; yet, how could it? She should soon be safe in France, and when she returned it was quite certain that no one would recognize in the brilliant heiress the country girl who had left her husband for money's sake.

The price—only a woman's honor and a man's heart—not much for all that surrounded her, for title, wealth, luxury, magnificence, for pleasures for which she had never dreamed, for gayety, and for every delight that could be imagined.

Yet it was strange how ill she felt, how faint and tired. She tried to rise, but she fell back weak and giddy.

"Surely," she said to herself, "I am not going to have an illness and die—die, just when all the world seems so bright and fair."

It passed away just then, but it returned again and again; she lost some of her dainty bloom. More than once the marquis, looking at her, asked her if she felt ill; the answer was always, "No."

A maid came whose sole duty was to wait upon her. Pattie Clark, a clever and shrewd lady's maid, who thoroughly understood the art of hair-dressing, and all other dressing. More than once, Lady Laure saw this maid looking at her with wonder, fear and anxiety. Then everything else was forgotten in the hurry of preparing for their journey to France; and a fortnight after she had reached Fernholme, the Marquis, Lady Laure and a retinue of servants started for Paris.

CHAPTER XV.

AN ALARMING ILLNESS.

THE marquis was the happy possessor of a very beautiful mansion in Paris, one that he had recently purchased, called the Hotel Bourdon. It was in the Champs Elysees, one of the most delightful parts of Paris. It was beautifully decorated and furnished, nothing more delightful could be imagined.

Lady Laure was delighted. This was different from Frome Castle, Fernholme or any other place she had seen, and in its way even more delightful. The marquis laid down a plan for the months they were to spend there, from which he did not intend to deviate.

Masters came in the morning, from whom Lady Laure took lessons in drawing, music, French. At noon came Mme. la Comtesse Le Care, a lady who had lost all her worldly wealth, and who gave lessons to the daughters of the aristocracy in deportment, manner, etiquette, and fashion.

La comtesse was delighted with her new pupil; she had no other who learned so quickly and who did so well. She assured the marquis that in less than two months his beautiful niece would be ready to take her place in the highest society in the land. He was delighted.

In the afternoon they drove from one place to another, from the Louvre to Versailles; then the marquis gave her by far the most valuable lessons she learned. He talked to her of the pictures, of the statues, of painters, of sculptors, until she could have passed an examination in the lives of great men.

The evenings were devoted to the opera, to concerts or to reading. A pleasant life; Lady Laure enjoyed it to her heart's content; the hours flew like moments. She had grown warmly attached to her uncle, who on his part was devoted to his charming niece.

As for remorse or thought, she had the happy faculty of trampling both under foot, of driving away all unpleasant memories, and of living only in the present. The marquis

amused both her and himself by drawing such brilliant pictures of the future that she was bewildered by them.

There was but one drawback to the happiness of her life, and that was she never felt quite well. Her dainty, brilliant bloom had faded. The marquis at first was concerned, but after a time he said, it must be the change from the fresh, country air to the warmer, closer atmosphere of a close city. He asked her continually if she were happy, if she were well, the answer always was:

"Yes, quite happy—quite well."

But she was not well; she was compelled to own it to herself; she was far from well. The strange sensation of giddiness and weakness, of sudden fainting, came over her again and again. It might be her fancy, but it seemed to her that she looked ill; her face was certainly changed; it had a pale, worn look. She was more troubled over that than over the fact of not feeling well; she knew how proud the marquis was of her beauty, and if she lost it! But why should she lose it?

"Bring me a hand-mirror, Pattie," she said one morning to her maid, who brought her a beautifully jeweled little mirror.

She looked into it long and carefully. Ah, surely the face was changed. That was not the lovely, radiant face that always looked as though it had caught its bloom from the roses and its sweetness from the dew; it was pale, with a strange kind of expression on it.

"Pattie," she said, suddenly, "I do not think I look so well or so healthy as I used to do."

There was a strange look on the girl's face as she answered:

"No, my lady, I do not think you do."

"I do not feel quite well," continued Lady Laure. "I used to be so strong, now I never feel well. The fragrance of flowers, the heat of the sun, any little trifle that never affected me before, now makes me feel faint and ill. I hope I am not going to have a long illness."

"I hope not, my lady," but the maid's voice was cold and hard.

"Why do you look at me so strangely, Pattie?" asked Lady Laure, impatiently.

"I beg your pardon, my lady; I was only thinking that

if you do not feel better soon, it would be as well to consult a doctor."

She watched her beautiful young mistress as she spoke, but in that lovely face there was no trace of confusion or fear; noting that, something of relief came over the face of the maid.

"That I certainly will do," said Lady Laure. "I had thought of it, but my uncle is always so anxious I did not like to mention it."

"It can be done without troubling the marquis, my lady, if you really wish it," said the maid.

"Why should I not really wish it? How strangely you look at me; or perhaps it is my fancy. I feel better this morning, better than I have done for some time. I must dress quickly; Monsieur George comes at ten for my drawing lesson."

Monsieur George came; the drawing lesson over, the countess came, and Lady Laure studied the art of presentation to great people; then, when the morning's study was over, she felt tired and rang for Pattie.

"Bring me a glass of orange-flower water, Pattie," she said. "I am very tired."

She was standing against the superbly carved mantelpiece when Pattie returned. She took the water from her hand, drank it, then suddenly, without a word or cry, fell on her face. The maid gave a little cry, then raised and laid her back on the sofa, her face white as death; she wrung her hands over the senseless figure of her mistress.

"I knew," she said to herself, "that it was so; I felt sure of it. Oh, Heaven, what shall I do? I wish I had never come; yet, poor lady, she will need a friend. I will not sit in judgment on her. I do not know the story of her life; there are secrets in it unknown to Monsieur le Marquis, unknown, it seems to me, even to herself, poor lady."

There was a scared, terrified look on Pattie's face as though she were in the presence of a foe she dreaded. Then she gave the whole of her attention to her mistress; the white eyelids quivered, the white lids trembled, a faint sigh came from them, and Lady Laure was herself again.

"I have been very ill, Pattie?" she said, wonderingly.

"Very ill, my lady," was the low reply.

"I can not tell. I can not think why I feel ill," she continued.

"If you take my advice, my lady, you will go to your room and rest for a time. I will tell Monsieur le Marquis that you have fatigued yourself; then later on we must see what can be done for you."

She made no resistance, but went to her room; and Pattie took her some luncheon. The marquis was pleased that she should rest, while the maid went about her duties with a pale, scared face, wondering what, in the name of Heaven, she should do.

"My lady," she said, "I wish you would do as you said this morning—see a doctor."

"I will," said Lady Laure, "that fainting fit frightened me. I will, Pattie."

Still Pattie did not go away. She began to play nervously with the tassels of the sofa-cushion.

"My lady," she said, gently, "should you think it a great liberty if I made a suggestion to you?"

"No, certainly not," said Lady Laure.

"There are many English doctors in Paris; and it would be much better, I am sure, to go to one of them."

"I could not speak French well enough to go to a French one," she said, with a smile; but no smile came on the face of her maid.

"I should like to suggest another thing, my lady, if I dare," said Pattie. "If you would but take my advice and go as a stranger; that is, go as a poor person, not as Lady Laure de Bourdon."

"Why should I do that?" she asked, quickly.

"Ah, my lady, if you would but be persuaded. You see—pardon me—I know more of the world than you do."

Lady Laure smiled.

"I can not see what your knowledge of the world has to do with my seeing a doctor," she said.

"I do, my lady. I wish you would let me persuade you to go plainly dressed; take a *fiacre* there, and do not tell your name to the doctor."

"I will do it if you will give me a sensible reason why, Pattie."

"I can do that, my lady. I am afraid that you are really ill enough to need sensible advice. Now if a doctor knows you, knows that you are Lady de Bourdon, he would

be all politeness and ceremony, but he would not tell you what ailed you. You see there is this difference between a rich patient and a poor one—the doctor tells the poor one straightforward and honestly what is the matter; from a wealthy lady he hides the truth. If you want sound, sensible advice do as I say, my lady."

She laughed carelessly.

"I will do it, Pattie, if it be only because you are so earnest over it."

The maid looked wistfully at her beautiful mistress.

"I am sure, my lady," she said, "that you will be much pleased that you have taken my advice."

Lady Laure laughed again; it was but a trifling matter to her. She was anxious over herself, but not to any great extent. She had had little to do with doctors; since she lay ill with the scarlet-fever, as a child, she had hardly seen one. It mattered little to her whether a fashionable physician drove up to the house in his carriage, or whether she went to some hard-working doctor, who would tell her the truth in brusque accents, and tell her how to get well quickly.

"If my lady will allow me," said Pattie, "I will make inquiries about the English doctors in Paris, and find out the best."

"How very persistent she is," thought Lady Laure. "There seems to me something strange about it."

She made some kindly, careless answer, and the maid left the room.

Lady Laure thought her more persistent still, when on the following morning she brought her a list of English doctors resident in Paris.

"I think Doctor Heming would be the best, my lady; he lives in the Rue de l'Orme, number fifteen. Will you try him?"

"He will do as well as any one else," said my lady.

Then Pattie added:

"I should not like you to go alone. If you do not object, my lady, I should like to go with you."

"Why should I object?" said Lady Laure, with an indolent smile. "You are very good to take such an interest in me."

CHAPTER XVI.

"I AM DOUBLY RUINED."

DR. HEMING was no longer young, and he had had a hard fight with the world. His house, No. 15 Rue de l'Orme, was shabby and ill-furnished; he himself was glad to receive patients at home, to attend them out of doors, to do anything by which he could honestly earn his fee. He was too honest even to be fashionable; too blunt and straightforward to be much liked. He was clever; but, unfortunately, in this world honesty and cleverness do not always make headway. He was sitting alone in his surgery one morning, reading up some melancholy case when his servant announced:

"Two young women. English."

The doctor looked up hastily.

"Englishwomen—are you quite sure, Jean? Are they ladies?"

"They are well-dressed; and one looks delicate," was the answer.

Then Dr. Heming knew that Jean was not in a communicative mood. He went into the saloon, and saw the two Englishwomen himself.

"It is not I who want to see you, doctor," said Pattie, abruptly; he had looked at her first; "it is—Miss Clarke."

They had agreed that Lady Laure should take her maid's name, and she had consented, thinking it all great nonsense. Dr. Heming looked at the so-called Miss Clarke; through the thick veil he saw what he thought to be an extremely beautiful face, very pale, with brilliant eyes, and framed in golden brown hair.

"Would you like to see me alone?" he asked, in a hesitating fashion.

It was Pattie who answered.

"Yes, I will wait here."

My lady shrugged her shoulders; what nonsense it all seemed to her. Then she followed the doctor to the surgery.

"Pray be seated," he said; and Lady Laure took the chair he placed for her.

The doctor sat down.

"You complain, then," he said, after a time, "of faintness, weakness, and a strange languor new to you."

Then followed a string of questions, all of which she answered carelessly enough.

But as she answered him the doctor's face darkened and grew puzzled.

"Would you mind raising your veil?" he said. "Talking without seeing the face of a person one addresses is like talking in the dark."

She raised her veil, and the doctor was startled by the delicate loveliness of the fair young face before him; yet his own grew more anxious as he looked at her. He left his chair; he walked once or twice up and down the room, then sat down again.

A few more words and his face grew more anxious.

"It has to be done," he muttered, between his teeth. "Why need I care?"

Yet she was so young and so beautiful, he hated to say the words. Suddenly he looked at her.

"You did not tell me that you were married," he said.

"I am not," she answered.

"For your own sake I hope you are," he said, earnestly.

Then, for the first time, some faint suspicion of the terrible truth must have crossed her mind, for her face flushed crimson, then grew pale as death.

"For your own sake," repeated the doctor, solemnly, "I hope you are married. I should not like to think you were not. Have you really no suspicion of what is wrong?"

"You frighten me," she said, in a faint voice.

The doctor's heart was deeply touched.

"There is nothing to be frightened at," he said, gently; "but I am compelled to speak straightforwardly to you; you have evidently no idea of what is wrong. I repeat that, for your own sake, I hope you are married. Do you know that in a short time from now, in four or five months, you will have a little child?"

He never forgot the cry that came to her white lips; it seemed to ring through the house; then she fell, like one dead, at his feet.

"What on earth shall I do?" he asked himself. "This

is a strange affair. Who can she be, I wonder? A lady, I am quite certain. What a face!"

He raised her and placed her in an easy-chair, then looked round for some strong essence or fragrant water.

He was thankful when, after some time, her eyes opened, and she looked round with a bewildered gaze. His words seemed to return to her when she saw his face.

"It is not true," she cried. "You did not mean it. I would rather be dead than it should be true."

"My dear lady," he said, gently, "it is indeed true. You have sought me to know the truth; I tell it to you."

"It can not be," she cried. "Oh, Heaven, it can not be."

He made no answer; he understood that no words would avail against that wild, hysterical outburst; she must grow calm before he could reason with her; she was like one mad in her despair; she wept bitter, passionate tears; she looked at the doctor.

"I shall kill myself," she said.

"It will be the worst form of suicide if you do," he replied, calmly.

He stood quite still, waiting while the anguish of her despair passed; then, when she was exhausted by weeping, he said:

"Will you listen to me?"

"Leave me alone," she cried, wildly; "leave me quite alone for a few minutes; I shall get better alone."

He went into the room where Pattie sat waiting; she had heard that terrible cry, and knew what it meant; she looked at the doctor.

"It is as I feared, then, doctor?" she said.

He made no answer.

She continued:

"You need not fear to speak to me; it was I who persuaded her to come here; and I shall, in all human probability, be her only friend; the only person who can help her."

"Who and what is she?" asked the doctor.

"That is her secret—not mine," said Pattie.

And then Dr. Heming thought it was time he returned to his patient. She had tried hard to control herself. She had longed to be alone that she might give full vent to her sorrow and despair.

"It can not be," she said to herself, "fate would not, could not be so cruel; it is too cruel; for if this be true, I am doubly ruined. I can never go back to Owen, and my uncle will send me away. What shall I do? It can not be true. I will not believe it!"

She looked up at him when he re-entered the room.

"Doctor," she said, "I pray you unsay those terrible words; they are driving me mad. Unsay them—they kill me with horror you can not understand. I will give all the jewels, all the money I have, if you will but unsay them."

"Poor child," he said, compassionately, "how can I unsay them? And if I did my words would be false. Is there nothing better that I can do to help you than that? Have you no mother living?"

"No," she sobbed, "my mother is dead."

"And—do not fear to trust me, child—have you no husband living?"

With these terrible words still ringing in her ears she dare not say no. She felt that the word must kill her. What she did was significant enough. She drew off her glove and showed him her left hand; it was small, beautiful, and white; gems of great value glittered on it; but there was no ring—no wedding-ring.

"I see," he said, with a groan. "Poor child, have you any friends?"

"No. I have no friend to whom I can tell this," she replied. "Oh, my God, what shall I do? What will become of me?"

"There is some mystery here," thought the doctor; "this is not one of the common cases of going wrong; there is a mystery."

"I am at a loss what to suggest to you," he said. "I can give you a few simple directions, and if you ever want help you can always send for me. I have really nothing more to add."

He looked startled at the munificent fee placed in his hands.

"I wish I could do more to help you," he said; "it is a terrible position for you."

"I shall need no help," she said, in a low voice; "the horror of it will kill me."

She held out her hand to him, with a simple, child-like grace.

"Thank you," she said, "you have been very good to me. The best that you can wish for me now is that I may die soon."

He was heartily grieved for her; that fair, troubled face haunted him all night. He could not forget the sad voice or the wistful eyes; he would have given much to have understood the mystery that surrounded her.

"I shall hear of her again," he said, "poor child. She will send for me in her distress."

While Lady Laure went back to her magnificent home like one utterly bewildered she spoke no word to Pattie; she had quite forgotten her. She heard and remembered nothing except those terrible words. Pattie was silent, too. She knew the time would come when her young mistress must speak to her.

Lady Laure fully realized the horror of her position when she was at home and alone. The marquis had not seen her for some hours, and he was kinder than usual. He had bought her some magnificent ornaments in the Palais Royal; he had ordered a superb set of dresses for her.

She forced herself to listen and to smile; she put the horror away from her, and tried to seem cheerful, bright and interesting; she talked to him about her lessons, about M. Georges and la comtesse; she told him some piquant little anecdotes that she had heard; but through it all there was something of languor that made the marquis slightly uneasy about her.

"Laure," he said, "are you quite sure that you are not doing too much? You have been accustomed to a life in the free, fresh air. Have you too many lessons—too much study?"

"No." She thanked him; she had not too much to do; she would even like more.

"I am anxious to improve," she said, and from her heart there rose a bitter cry.

He must soon know all, and then? It would not be for much longer that she should enjoy the luxuries and the grandeur of this magnificent house. A terrible doom was on her, her life of luxury must soon end; then would come sorrow, disgrace, shame and ruin.

The marquis had an engagement that evening; and she found herself in her room alone with her anguish and despair.

CHAPTER XVII.

"DO HELP ME, PATTIE."

ALONE with her anguish and despair, what was she to do, what was to become of her, she could not tell. After all, the pain she had inflicted on Owen was all in vain; her hopes, ambitions, plans, pleasures, all were ended. Life itself was ended for her; she would never go back to Owen. He might be willing to receive her—she did not know, she was not at all certain about it. He might either forgive her, and take her back to the shelter of his honest heart again, or he might refuse to take her back again—to see her, to speak to her. Yet no, even as the thought came to her mind she remembered his words, "I would follow you like a dog and die humbly at your feet." But even if he would forgive her and take her home again, could she go? Could she voluntarily take up again the life she had laid down? could she return to poverty, the small house, the small means, the shabby dress, the privations, the absence of all that she had learned to consider as life? could she bear it? No, a thousand times no. Had she never known what this life was she could have endured the other; having learned this, no other would be endurable.

As she sat there thoughts of Owen pressed upon her; how pleased he would have been. She remembered one day, when they were out together, they had met a pretty, fair-haired, toddling child, and Owen had raised it in his strong arms.

"Do you love children, Owen?" she had asked.

"Love them? Yes," he answered, in his grave, quiet voice. "I have to thank Heaven for the best gift in the world in my dear wife. I think my happiness would be quite complete if to that were added the gift of a little child."

If she knew how cruel she had been to him; how desolate and bare his life had been made by her. Her heart softened to him; after all, he was the best, truest, kindest friend she had in the world.

Then she shook all such thoughts from her mind; she had her own difficulty and distress to think about. What was she to do?

She did not know until then how dear this beautiful life was to her; how she prized its grandeur and magnificence; how she loved its ease and luxury.

"I could never go back to that life again," cried the unhappy girl as she wrung her hands. "What shall I do?"

Her quick imagination foreshadowed every terrible scene that might happen—how her uncle would make the discovery, would overwhelm her with reproaches. She could so well imagine the lofty contempt of the aristocrat for such a fault as hers; he would be sure to drive her away from his home; she would be a reproach and a by-word even to the very servants there, when she was driven forth from her home. Where was she to go? She would have to die in the ditch by the road-side; there would be none to help her.

It was too terrible, too cruel; the unhappy girl walked to and fro; she wrung her hands, she tossed her white arms in the air, she cried aloud in her misery, but there was no comfort for her. Once a good impulse came to her, which it would have been well had she carried out; the impulse to go to her uncle and tell him all; confess her fault to him, tell him the whole story of her marriage, its concealment, and now the terrible consequences of it. She would have saved herself and others endless pain had she done so; but she was afraid; she could not tell the courtly, polished, elegant marquis that story; she did not care to own to him that she had married a gardener, that she, Lady Laure de Bourdon, was the lawful wife of Lord Cardin's employé. No, let her suffer what she might, she could never tell him that.

She bent her golden head and wept bitter tears for the dead mother who would have befriended her. Still the question puzzled her as much as ever; what was she to do? She had no hope, no prospect of escape; but it seemed to her that if she could only tell her terrible secret to some one, it would be less hard to bear. She would tell Pattie; she must have one friend and confidante. Pattie had always been kind to her. How thankful she was now that she had taken her advice and had gone *incog.* to visit a doctor. What would have become of her had it been otherwise?

She would trust Pattie; she was fertile and quick of resource.

She waited until the evening following, then told her maid to wait in her room as she wanted to speak to her; and Pattie stood patiently listening for her lady's footstep.

Lady Laure entered the room and closed the door. She had kept up appearances well during the day; but now that all need of restraint had passed away, she sunk upon the sofa, pale, exhausted, and trembling. When she had recovered she called Pattie to her.

"Sit down by my side, Pattie," she said; "I have much to tell you; I want you to be my friend and confidante."

"I will be anything you please, my lady," she replied.

Then Lady Laure told her story; but in one respect she spoke falsely, for she told her that her husband was dead.

"You understand, Pattie," she said, "the peculiar position. I had only been married a few months and I heard that I am, or ought to be, heiress of this immense fortune, yet it would all have been lost to me if my uncle heard one word of my marriage. My husband was—was—was dead then; and it seemed to me useless to tell my uncle I had been married, and so lose this fortune."

"It would have been quite useless, as your husband was dead," said Pattie; "of course, had he been living it would have been quite another thing."

Then Lady Laure showed her wedding-ring. To do her justice, no doubt as to the entire truth of her story ever entered Pattie's mind. That story explained everything that had puzzled her; it left her lady pure and blameless; guilty only of one thing, that was of having concealed her marriage from her uncle; and, to Pattie's mind, the concealment that had purchased this wondrous wealth was of very little matter; it fact she did not consider it wrong at all.

"Now, Pattie," said Lady Laure, "you see that I have trusted you as I have trusted no one else on earth; you are the only one to whom I have told my story, the only one who knows that I have been married; but I am safe in your hands, you will be true to me, I know."

"I will be true to you, my lady, until I die," was the answer, and the girl kept her word.

Then Lady Laure had to tell her why she trusted her, why she needed a friend, and what the doctor had said.

"I knew it, my lady," said the girl, quietly; "it was for that I persuaded you to do as you did; it is no surprise to me."

"Ah, then you can understand all my grief and despair; in any way it means ruin to me. If to save myself from my uncle's anger, I tell him that I have been married, he will never forgive me either the marriage or its concealment. I know him so well, better than any one else; he is so proud, so truthful, he would never forgive me, Pattie, and there is nothing but a life of misery, poverty, and shame before me; if he finds it out, and I do not confess my marriage, it would be even worse."

"Would you mind telling me, my lady, who your husband was?" asked the maid, thoughtfully.

"Quite a poor man, belonging to the lower class," she answered.

"Ah, then, it would never do to confess it; if he had been a brave soldier, a gentleman, however poor, the marquis might have pardoned it."

"He would never forgive it, Pattie; at least, not now. If I had told him before, it would have been all right, perhaps; yet I know it would not. Can you not think of any way in which you can help me? You seem to be so clever, so quick for resource—think for me, Pattie. I have no mother, sister, or friend—I have only you."

The proud Lady Laure bent her head on the two honest hands and wept bitter tears.

"Do help me, dear Pattie," she said. "When I am rich, I will make you rich; I will give you anything in this world, if you will but help me. Do try, Pattie."

She was like some beautiful, troubled child in her bitter distress.

"I will help you, my lady; I would give my life for you. I will help you in some way or other. The only thing that I can see, under the circumstances, is, as the secret has been kept from the marquis until now, it had better be kept from him altogether."

"If we could but manage that," said Lady Laure, with a deep sigh.

"That is what we must try for. If my lord would go back to England for a few months, and leave you here; or if I could persuade him to let you go with me for a few weeks into the country."

Lady Laure's white face brightened.

"Ah, if that could be done, Pattie. Do not make me hope. I have been so long in the depth of despair, I dare not hope; but, oh, if that could be! I will make you a rich woman, Pattie, if you will help me."

"I do not want reward, my lady. I am so truly sorry for you—I understand so well the position in which you are placed. I see it and understand it. Of course when your husband died, you had no idea of this, and it was quite natural that you should wish to conceal your marriage from the marquis. I will help you, because the pity of it stirs my heart, and I am more sorry for you than words can tell."

"What can you do, Pattie?" she asked.

"I must think, my lady. Cases far more difficult than this have been managed. I will try my best—I will think over every plan that is feasible, my lady. I am glad you have trusted me. Now you must cheer up; you have nothing to reproach yourself with, nothing to make you really unhappy; for, under the circumstances, no one could ever say that concealing your marriage was a sin; and I promise you that by some means or other I will help you, so that you may keep your secret still. Rely on that promise, and let your heart rest on it, my lady, when you feel dull. I will help you in some way."

"If she knew the truth," thought Laure—"if she knew that I had left my husband living and miserable for the sake of a fortune, I wonder if she even would help me? I am guilty, and deserve no help, yet I pray Heaven to send it to me!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FAINT HOPE.

A FEW weeks passed, and as yet no solution of the dreadful question had occurred to them. Lady Laure had recovered from the first effects of her terrible fright. She was calm, self-possessed, and quite herself. She studied her uncle more attentively than ever, she talked to him on various subjects; she tried to understand his thoughts, and the better she knew him the more convinced she became that if he knew all there would be no pardon for her. He was a

nobleman by nature as well as by birth. There were certain sins and vices he could not tolerate; no amount of pride displeased him; he could forgive a man for gambling, but he had no pardon for so mean a sin as a lie; he could not forgive deceit, he could not tolerate deception, he could not brook meanness. Lady Laure began to understand him better; he might perhaps have pardoned her marriage, had she boldly owned it, and pleaded in extenuation that she loved her husband, but he would never forgive the lie that had concealed it, she knew the smile of contempt, the wave of the white hand with which he would say:

"I have never known a liar, and never will know one; from now we are strangers!"

That would be the end of her romance, if ever one inkling of the truth came to him. Every morning her first anxious question was:

"Well, Pattie, have you thought of anything yet?"

And the answer was always:

"Not yet, my lady; but I shall think of something; you will be safe."

The days were passing into weeks, the weeks into months; not much longer could she keep this terrible secret which was like devouring fire in her heart. There were times when great drops of anguish stood on her brow, and the strength of her limbs failed her. What should she do if he found it out?"

She had tried to persuade him to let her go into some school; it would be easier to leave there for a time than to leave him; but he would not hear of the plan.

"The truth is, Laure," he said, "I am too fond of you to part with you; I do not know how I lived without you. I am quite sure that I could not live without you now, even for one week. You do not know how I have learned to love you."

Words that would have filled her with proud triumph a short time since, but now they pierced her heart with sorrow and dismay.

What should she do?

"I have been thinking, Laure," said her uncle, "that as you have improved so very much, I may shorten the time of our exile. I noticed you yesterday. I consider myself a good judge of manners, and yours now are perfect;

there is not the faintest tinge of rusticity about them; we ought to thank Madame la Comtesse, I think; we may really return to Fernholme sooner than I thought. Are you pleased to hear it, Laure?"

She threw her arms round his neck and kissed him, lest he should see the white face she must hide; then, when the color returned to it, she raised it and looked at him.

"How could I be anything but pleased, uncle?" she asked. "Paris is very bright and pleasant, but Fernholme is home."

"You are right, my darling," he said; "it is home, and you shall be its queen."

What should she do? What could she do? She clinched her little white hands until the rings made cruel red dents in them. The marquis, all unconscious, continues:

"I can not tell you, Laure, how I look forward to it; I shall be so proud of my beautiful niece—so proud to see you take the head of my table, the management of my house; so proud to present you to my friends. We must talk this matter over again; I think really we may shorten our exile very much."

She listened calmly, but in her own heart she was crying out all the time, What should she do? What could she do?

The moment her uncle quitted the house she went to Pattie.

"Pattie," she cried, in despair, "have you thought of nothing yet?" and the answer was the same as usual:

"Not yet, but an idea will soon come."

"It will come too late," cried the unhappy girl. "What must I do? Had any one ever such an unhappy lot as mine? Was there ever such a sorrow, Pattie? I am going mad with sorrow and suspense."

Clever as Pattie was, she could find no solution to the difficulty. If the marquis cared less for his niece, it would have been easier to manage; as it was, he seemed to grudge every moment she spent out of his sight; that made the real difficulty—one that she could not see her way through. Pattie became as anxious as her mistress, if not more so. Lady Laure placed her faith and reliance on Pattie, while Pattie saw at present no means of justifying it.

"It is more than enough to turn my hair," she said to herself; "I can not sleep at night for thinking of it, yet I

can see no way. I am so sorry for her that I would do anything on earth to help her, yet what can I do?"

One morning the marquis entered his niece's boudoir; he held an open letter in his hand. Pattie was there arranging some lace; she rose to go when the marquis appeared; but, by a movement of his hand, he indicated a wish that she should stay. It never occurred to the proud Marquis de Bourdon that servants had ears or eyes; he talked before them as though they were quite without those senses. Pattie resumed her seat.

"My dear Laure," said the marquis, "I wish to consult you."

She looked at him in some little wonder; it was not often that he consulted her.

"I have received a letter from my solicitors this morning," he said; "and they tell me that there is likely to be a lawsuit connected with a certain right of way over my property at Fernholme. Now, if there should be a lawsuit, I must be at home; not, you understand, for one moment, that I distrust my solicitors, but because I am anxious to win. It is an old dispute, and the settling of it will entail reading over all the deeds. I must be there."

She made no answer; only Heaven knew the suspense of the tortured heart. If he went, all would be well; she could keep her secret. He mistook the pallor that spread over her face for anxiety for him.

"There is nothing to dread, Laure," he said; "it is only a point of honor, after all, nothing more; it has been a vexed question for years, whether the inhabitants of King's Wynne have a right of way through certain parts of Fernholme Park. I maintain they have not, they maintain that they have; and now it seems possible that the question will be tried by law."

She tried to speak calmly as she asked him if his presence was really needful; she could feel rather than see Pattie's eyes telling her that this was the opportunity, this was what they had longed for.

"I must be there," he said; "I am vain enough to fancy that no one understands the deeds and papers so well as myself; and I am quite determined that it shall be fought to the last inch; if the people had asked my permission to use that part of the park, I should certainly have given it to them, fully and freely; but I will not have it taken for

granted; even if they lose and I win, I shall give it to them, but it shall be a gift, not a privilege."

"That is the spirit of the old French nobles, uncle," she said. He was delighted with her words.

"You are right, Laure," he said; "we give freely that which we allow no man to take from us. I come to consult you. If there should be a lawsuit, and I am compelled to go, would you like to remain here, or will you come home with me?" Again he mistook the deathly pallor of her face for the intensity of her anxiety for him. "You shall come to Fernholme with pleasure if you will," he said; "indeed, I should not like to go without you."

She felt like a drowning man who sees the last plank drawn from under his feet; yet she was careful; it would not do to lose this most precious chance by undue haste.

"Of course," she said, slowly, "it would be far better to be with you, uncle; but you would be four months away, you say?"

"Yes; quite that, Laure," he answered.

"And in four months I should have perfected myself in French, and should be able to give up study, whereas, if I go with you now, I should be compelled to return."

"Yes, that is true," he said, thoughtfully.

"Still, if I can be of any use to you, uncle, or of any service to you, or you would like me with you—but you will be surrounded by clever men, and you will have no time to see me, even if I go."

"Not much, Laure. Perhaps, after all, it would be more sensible for you to remain here and finish your studies; it would be very dull for you at Fernholme, as I should be continually occupied with business."

The mistress and the maid looked at each other; the same thought was written on both faces:

"This is our opportunity—let us take it."

Lady Laure wanted to know more; her heart was beating in a tumult of suspense.

"It is not all settled then?" she said. "You do not know whether there will be a lawsuit or not?"

"No, not at present," he replied.

She looked calmly in his face.

"When shall you know, uncle?" she asked.

"In a week or ten days," he replied; "then we will consider the question disposed of. If I go to England, you

remain here, Laure, and I shall rejoin you when the lawsuit is ended; then we will go on to Italy together.''

"Yes," she replied, quietly; "that will be very nice."

He bent down and kissed her, then quitted the room. Pattie went up to her mistress.

"What a chance, my lady!" she said; "what a wonderful chance! If he goes, you need never have another moment's fear about your secret.''

"If he goes," she cried, in feverish haste; "will you tell me, Pattie, how I am to live—how I am to live until I know whether he is going or not?—how I am to bear the suspense? It will drive me mad!''

"Try not to think of it, it is only a week. He may even hear before that. A week soon passes, and I feel a certain hope that the marquis will go to England and leave us here.''

"And I have a presentiment that he will not go, Pattie. It is too good to be true. It seems a chance such as would be given to a good person."

"You are good, my lady,'' was the half-indignant answer; "and the chance will be yours."

CHAPTER XIX.

A GUILTY WOMAN'S SUSPENSE.

A WEEK, a whole week of unutterable suspense; how was she to live through it? The more she thought of the matter, the more clearly she saw that if the marquis would go away, all would be well. Pattie was ingenious, clever, full of contrivance; she would be sure to think of some plan to help her, and in his absence all would be well. She thought of it so continuously, her mind and thoughts brooded on it so entirely, without intermission, that she had no other idea. She seemed only to live to know how this would be settled—every morning she met Pattie with the same question:

"Is there a letter from England?''

And the answer was, "No.''

For the first three or four days, she would not yield to her forebodings. She tried resolutely to assure herself it would be all right, he would be quite sure to go. She did not dare to ask him, lest he should think she was over anxious, and so suspect something; but on the fifth day, when

Pattie gave the usual answer, "No, there is no letter from England," she said to herself that she could bear the suspense no longer. When her uncle joined her at dinner, she said to him:

"Have you any news from England, uncle? Will you be compelled to go, do you think?"

"I am beginning to think not," he replied. "I fancy that I should have heard before now had there been any prospect of a lawsuit. My solicitors said they would write and tell me at once when the decision was made. As I have not heard, I should imagine that it is all at an end."

She turned her face away, lest he should see its deadly pallor.

"You must be pleased," she said, briefly.

"I do not know that I am," he replied, laughingly; "on the contrary, I think I should have liked the excitement of a lawsuit; not that it is at all settled yet. I may hear by any post; I can not possibly tell."

It was not wise, she felt, to continue the subject. More eagerly than ever she watched the post. Pattie dreaded in the morning to enter her room—the beautiful, pleading face, the wistful eyes, touched her heart so deeply. The last three days told dreadfully on Lady Laure; her face grew quite worn with constant watching; she could not sleep or rest for the one thought that pursued her constantly—Would there be a letter from England; would he have to go or not?

At last the seventh day came, and Pattie went to her lady's room earlier than usual.

"My lady," she said, "there is a letter from England this morning; the valet has taken it to the marquis."

It had come, then—the letter that was to be either her death-warrant, or to contain hope that would lead to her safety. It had come, the very knowledge of it made her faint and ill.

"Of course you can not tell what news the letter contains, Pattie. I hope I shall know it soon. I suffer so terribly from this suspense—so terribly. My uncle will be sure to tell me when he sees me, will he not?"

She dressed with trembling hands; she went down into the breakfast room and there waited for him. In after years she marveled how she had lived through that time. The delay seemed to her a bad omen; if the marquis had

the prospect of a long journey before him, he surely would have hurried down-stairs, he would not have delayed. At length she heard him; he came into the room, and after the usual greeting had taken place between them, he began his breakfast. No word of the letter.

To the miserable girl who had been counting the moments in such terrible anxiety and pain, it seemed to her as though he had never cared so much about eating before. The claret did not please him; he wanted the yellow seal, they had brought him the red; he wanted apricots, and they had brought peaches. She had to listen to it all in silence, while her heart was beating and her very soul was torn by anxiety. She dare not speak, she dare not ask frankly if he had had a letter from England; she felt that such a question must have betrayed her—she had not self-command to ask it; she had too much at stake—it was a matter of life and death to her.

The marquis began talking about indifferent matters—the superiority of French fruit; how, if you wanted to taste an orange in perfection, you must pluck it from the tree and eat it—while her heart was sick with suspense. Every moment her hopes sunk lower and lower—it was quite evident that he had no news to tell her. If a journey to England lay before him, all his interest would not be centered in Seville oranges and St. Catherine pears.

"There is no lawsuit," she said to herself, "and he does not think it worth while to mention the matter to me. It is so little to him that he has forgotten all about it."

Her heart sunk, her face grew pale, her breakfast was untouched; it was all quite plain to her, he was not going, and so her last chance had ended.

"Laure," said the marquis, "you are taking no breakfast. The morning is very beautiful; would you like a drive round the Bois de Boulogne?"

Ah, then, she was right; she never knew how much she had hoped before; she was right, he was not going. If he had any thought of a journey to England, he would not have thought of driving round the Bois de Boulogne. For a few minutes the disappointment was so great she could not speak; prudence compelled her to make some effort.

"I should like it, if you are not engaged, uncle," she answered.

"No, I have no other engagement," he said.

Then she felt quite sure that her worst fears were realized; he was not going; then the marquis added, suddenly:

"When I say I have no other engagement, I mean for this morning. I have had a letter from my solicitors, and I start for England to-night."

Her suspense and agitation had been so great—her disappointment so bitter and keen—that the reaction was more than she could bear; her self-possession suddenly left her, and she broke out into a most passionate fit of sobbing. The marquis was both puzzled and flattered—puzzled because his niece was as a rule so self-possessed and calm; flattered because he thought her tears were an evidence of how little she liked parting with him.

"My dear Laure!" he cried.

But she recovered herself quickly. She looked up at him.

"I beg your pardon, uncle," she said; "but you took me by surprise."

"And you do not like parting with me?" he said.

"Whom have I in the world but you?" she said.

"You shall go with me, Laure, if you will. I should like it best."

"You are very good to me," she sobbed, as she kissed his hand; "but no, we will leave the arrangement as it is, uncle. I will stay here now that I am making rapid progress, and will soon finish my studies."

Then, with the quick tact that was natural to her, she began to talk at once about the lawsuit, and so engrossed his thoughts and attention he forgot to say another word about her going with him.

"Now, Laure, if you will dress at once we will have a drive," he said.

And she hastened to her room. Her agitation was so great that she could scarcely dress.

"Pattie," she said, hysterically, "I am saved; he is going to England."

Pattie saw that she would break down unless some strong measures were taken at once. The agitation had been too great for her.

"My lady," she said, calmly, "his going will be of little use unless you control yourself more. No one could look at you without knowing you have some terrible secret at stake; your face flushes and pales, your hands tremble,

your eyes look as though you were waiting for something to happen. Unless you control yourself the marquis will notice how unlike you are to your real self."

The result of this little lecture was that Laure behaved with such quiet dignity, such wonderful self-possession that the marquis was charmed.

"I see," my dear Laure," he said, as he drove through the beautiful Bois de Boulogne, "I see one thing very plainly, you have learned the real secret of a thoroughly high-bred woman."

"I am pleased that you think so, uncle. What is it?" she asked.

"The power of controlling any great expression of emotion—either joy, fear, surprise, liking, or disliking. There is nothing, in my mind, so thoroughly under-bred as that. I am pleased to see that you have mastered that secret and made it your own."

So they talked through the long hours of the sunny morning. The Marquis de Bourdon had never been more delighted with his niece. The relief to her mind was so great; the strain of uncertainty and suspense had been almost more than she could bear; now it was over; she had infinite faith in Pattie. Only let the marquis once go, some plan or other would surely be found, and she should be saved; the very thought of it filled her mind and heart with a glow of delight and triumph. Once more she could look up in his face and listen with a smile as he talked about the future and what it held.

"Though," he said with a smile, "though I am looking forward with delight to your making a brilliant marriage, still that will be my loss; I shall never be able to live without you, Laure."

"Then I must stay with you always, uncle; and never mind the marriage," she said.

But he shook his head gravely.

"You must be married, Laure; it is not a matter of choice or inclination, it is simply that the grand old race of the De Bourdons must not die out."

She made him no answer. The west wind was blowing, and the sky was clear. She felt uncomfortable. It was one thing to leave Owen for a large fortune, to be a great heiress and a great lady, but it was quite another thing to marry some one else.

"I need not complicate my troubles," she thought, "I need not think of that now, I will vanquish one trouble at a time, and this is neither first nor foremost."

CHAPTER XX.

A LITTLE STRANGER.

To the very last she maintained her composure, and the marquis left his beautiful niece, quite sure that she deeply lamented his loss and would be glad to see him again.

"I like traveling," thought the marquis, "and I like Continental life, but I shall be glad when all this is over, and we can settle down in peace."

All the way to England he thought about how much his niece loved him, and how happy he was to have one who was like a fair young daughter to him.

When he had really gone the reaction came; and it seemed to Lady Laure almost more than she could bear. She had hardly dared hope, now she could open her heart and let hope come in.

In less than half an hour both mistress and maid were seated together, discussing what it would be best to do.

Pattie, shrewd, quick, intelligent, had half a dozen plans in her mind. The most feasible after all was this, that Lady Laure should remain where and as she was for a few weeks longer, Pattie making it her sole business to tend to her; then they would go into the country for a few weeks and all would be well. There would be no need to tell the marquis where they went at first; but when the danger was over it would be so easy for Lady Laure to write and say that she did not feel very well and had gone into the country with her maid for a time. Even if he were vexed over it, it would be too late to interfere; he could but write and say that he should prefer Lady Laure returning home.

Then Pattie had the whole affair arranged in her own mind. She knew about twenty miles from Paris a pretty little village called Combieres on the Seine, and there it would be easy enough to find apartments. The plan she arranged pleased Lady Laure; she embraced her affectionately.

"You give me new life and new hope, Pattie," she said; "if I live to get over this hour I will thank you."

Everything seemed so well that Lady Laure was full of hope. While the fright, the terror, the pain had been on her, she had never dared look forward; she had tried to forget the future; now she dared think of it again, and she spent long hours in dreaming of what she might do and of what might happen to her, of the glorious triumphs, of the wealth, the luxury, the magnificence that awaited her.

The weeks ran on smoothly enough. Lady Laure declined the lessons, on the plea that she did not feel strong enough for too much study. She said so often that the climate of Paris during the winter did not suit her, she had a perpetual cold, and should be glad when the spring took her back to England again, that the servants and the few people that saw her became accustomed to seeing her wrapped in a shawl as though the cold weather was too much for her. They fell also in the way of treating her as though she was an invalid. It became customary to ask, "How is my lady this morning?" and Pattie always had an answer.

"My lady was suffering from cold, or from headache; Paris did not seem to agree with her."

So that when at length it was rumored that my lady was going into the country to see if change of air would benefit her, no one was surprised. Mme. la Comtesse said that change of air cured the most obstinate cold; the servants all hoped their young mistress would benefit by it.

Pattie was adroit enough not to tell any one where they were going. She took tickets for Moucerne; from Moucerne traveled back to Combieres. She had taken every precaution; she had purchased a widow's costume for Laure.

"You must call yourself a soldier's widow, my lady," she said; "here in France the soldiers are so dearly beloved; to say you are the widow of one will be to enlist all hearts in your favor. Madame Duvand I have written on some of your papers. Will you keep that name? And, my lady, pray excuse me, you must put on your wedding-ring."

She was proud, vain, cold of heart, ready to sacrifice everything to gratify her own pride and ambition, yet the tears came into her eyes as she once more placed the wedding-ring on her finger. Poor Owen, how he had loved

her. How proud and happy he was on the day she first wore that ring.

"I think," said Lady Laure to her maid, "it must have been Heaven that sent you to me. What should I have done without you?"

But had Pattie known the whole story she would have felt quite sure that Heaven had no share in it. Pattie did not know it, and she believed herself to be doing a most kind and meritorious action in helping her beloved mistress.

That evening in the pretty little village of Combieres, it was known that a beautiful lady, the widow of a brave French soldier—a Swiss lady it was rumored—had come to the place to seek for lodgings. They were soon found in a pretty little house outside the village; the mistress of it was the widow of a soldier, so that she was pleased to receive Mme. Duvand.

"At last, at last, Pattie, we are at rest," said Lady Laure; and she was smiling now that her anxieties were all passed—was thankful, too, that they had found rest.

* * * * * * *

The next scene in the story was when Lady Laure lay watching the setting sun, her little child in her arms.

How she loved it. She had thought she should dislike it—it would be so tiresome a tie, a bore; yet now it seemed to her that a perfect heaven of love had opened to her. That little, lovely babe, she was never tired of looking at it. It never grew less wonderful or less marvelous to her.

Such a lovely babe. It had her own eyes, soft, bright, and beautiful. It had Owen's grand square brow and shapely lips. It had Owen's clustering hair. She almost worshiped it.

"I can never leave my baby, Pattie," she said. "I would not give him up for all the wealth and titles in England. I would not, indeed."

"Very well, my lady; you shall please yourself," said the maid, who loved the child almost as much as his mother. "You shall please yourself, and do whatever makes you most happy."

No, she could never leave that little child. She kissed the tiny pink hands, the little, soft face, the clustering curls; all the wonderful mother-love had awoke in her heart

all at once. The wealth might perish, she must keep her son.

Twenty times each day she called Pattie to her side, that she might admire the little one.

"Was there everything so perfect?" she would ask; and in all sincerity the maid replied:

"Never."

Then, when the soft bright eyes closed, and the little rosebud face was still in slumber, she would watch the child with tears in her eyes. How Owen would have loved him —poor Owen—who had now neither wife nor child; how he would have thanked Heaven that his heart's desire had been granted; and, as she lay with closed eyes, her busy brain was shaping pictures of what might have been.

She saw Owen on the garden-chair, under the vine leaves, his handsome face radiant with delight; his book laid aside and the child at his knee; a fair-haired, beautiful child just learning to speak, and loving his strong, tall, handsome father with all his heart; then she saw Owen rise from his seat and place the little one on his shoulder while they went to look for bright-eyed squirrels in the wood. She could hear the child's cries of delight. Again it was a summer evening, and Owen was busy with the flowers he loved so well, yet not too busy to tend the pretty, toddling child who walked after him with blind idolatry wherever he went; not so busy but that every now and then he made a soft ball of the yellow cowslips and threw it into the little hands. Picture after picture, until her heart beat and burning tears fell from her eyes.

"Owen, Owen," she cried. How cruel she had been to him; she had robbed him not only of his wife, but of his child. And he would have loved his child. How cruel she had been. She felt an intense longing for Owen to see his little son. Strong, noble, handsome Owen, her heart ached for him.

"Owen," she cried, aloud; and Pattie the next moment was by her side.

"My lady, you are fretting," she said, anxiously; "you must not fret."

"I was thinking about my husband, Pattie," she said; "I was wishing he could have seen the child."

"You were crying for Owen, my lady. Was Owen your husband's name?"

"Yes," she answered, gently.

"Then you must call the boy Owen, my lady; he should have his father's name."

"I have been thinking of that," she answered. "I should like to call him John Owen; I do not think I could bear to use the name Owen continually."

"That will do very nicely; you can call him John. I like the name John; there is something sturdy and English about it. But, my lady, you must not grieve. If Heaven has taken your husband, this dear little child has been sent in his place."

But my lady shuddered as she listened; she knew better than any one else the truth. Heaven had not taken her husband; she had left him. What wrong had she not done him? And the little son—how he would miss the love and care of that strong, noble father, as he grew up. She had wronged her child as well as his father; neither one nor the other could ever have anything in life that would atone for what she had robbed them of. Well might she gather the little one in her arms and weep bitter tears over him. Of one thing, she said to herself, she was quite determined—she would never give up the child. She kissed the little hands, the sweet, tiny face. She meant what she said, when she cried out again and again that nothing should part her from her child.

CHAPTER XXI.

"THE PRICE—OH, MY GOD, THE PRICE!"

THREE weeks had passed away, and Lady Laure had quite recovered her health and strength. She sat one morning thinking deeply. Pattie had been to Paris and had brought with her some letters, among which was one from the marquis, saying that he hoped to return to Paris in a week or ten days; that he had been sorry to hear that his niece had not been well; that she had done quite right in going into the country for a change; he hoped that she felt the benefit of it; he added, also, that he was pleased to tell her he had won the lawsuit.

That letter had made her think very seriously. She had said a hundred times over that she would never give up her baby—never, come what might; now her resolve must be

put to the test. If she intended to keep the little one, she must make her choice at once; she would have to tell the marquis all about it, and then would follow his anger and her dismissal. She felt she could go with better grace to Owen now; he might have refused her before, but with the baby in her arms he would welcome her she knew, now. Then there stretched out before her the long vista of years, the poverty, the privation—the contrast between that and her future as Lady Laure was so great.

Yet she could not leave him there; he lay in his little cot, pink, dimpled, and beautiful. How could she put him in some other woman's arms and know that she might never see him again? How could she rest by night or by day away from him? She knelt down by his side, and bent her beautiful face over the one that was so like her own.

"I could not leave my darling," she said.

The little restless hands would seek her. No, she could not go. The wealth and title must pass; she would not give up her child. She rose up resolutely and went to her desk; there was no alternative; she must write and tell her uncle. There was one thing—she need not, unless she liked, see the marquis again; she could leave France before he returned; then she must go to Owen. She had no money, no means of providing for herself; she would be compelled to go to him at once.

She sat thinking, with the pen in her hands, wondering how she was to begin her letter; wondering what she must say. She was never so near telling the truth in her life as then.

A shadow fell between her and the sun; Pattie stood waiting to see her.

"My lady," she said, "you have news from England; is the marquis coming home?"

"He will be back again in ten days," was the reply.

"Then, my lady, it is high time we arranged for the little one. We ought to be back at least four days before the marquis returns, so that the novelty of our return may have worn off; they will cease to speak of our journey or our going home by that time."

"Pattie," said my lady, softly, "I do not think I can give up my baby."

"Certainly not; nor do I see that it will be necessary," said the maid.

"I have been thinking it over. I could not leave him. I was just thinking how I should begin my letter to my uncle."

"You have decided, then, to tell him?" asked Pattie, in some surprise.

"Yes; I must. I could not give up my beautiful little child," she replied.

"That involves much; where and how shall you live, my lady, if you do that?"

She was on the very point of saying, "I should go back to my husband," when she suddenly recollected herself, and with a hot flush on her face she answered:

"I shall have all that to think about, Pattie."

The maid looked more thoughtful than the mistress. Suddenly she said:

"My lady, I do not know; but it seems to me really a great pity after all; after all the trouble we have had, and the success that has attended all our plans, it seems to me really a sad pity to undo it all."

"Yes, I agree with you; but what can I do? I can not give up my baby."

"I think it could be very nicely arranged, my lady. I will take all the risks. We will leave the little one here for a time. I can come often to see it; you sometimes. Then when we are settled again in England, I can say that my sister is dead and has left me the little child to care for—do you see, my lady?"

"Yes, I understand," said Lady Laure.

"Then I shall ask your permission to come and bring the little one away to England. Surely, among my lord's tenants, I can find one who will gladly—if well paid—undertake the care of a child. Then nothing would be more natural than that you, my lady, should be kind to an orphan child of whom I have charge; indeed," she continued, "it seems to me that you could do more for him that way than if you have to work to keep him."

Lady Laure's face brightened beautifully.

"How clever you are, Pattie," she said. "I should never have thought of such a thing; what a mind you have. If we can only do that, all will be well. Can it be managed, do you think?"

"I am quite sure that it can be managed, my lady. Nothing will please the mistress of the house better than to have the little one with her. She will take good care of it; the place is healthy, and she is very kind. Of course it will be a trial for you to leave him; but when you have already suffered so much to win the fortune, it seems to me really a pity to give it up. It will be hard to leave him, but try to think of the time when you will see him at Fernholme, a sturdy, beautiful little fellow, living in the fields and lanes. Try to think of the time when you will send him to school, and he will become a clever man. Ah, my lady, with so much to look forward to, never mind the little trouble of leaving him."

"It is not a little trouble, Pattie, but a very great one," said my lady, sorrowfully.

"But," said Pattie, "if you have no money, and had to work for him, you would be compelled to leave him."

"Yes, that is true. I feel inclined to trust all to you, Pattie. I am glad you spoke to me before I had begun the letter. If it has to be done, we had better do it at once, so as to be quite settled at home before the marquis arrives; but, Pattie, you must come to see him often."

"Trust me, my lady; I shall be quite as anxious as you about him. It will be so pleasant for you, my lady, when these few little troubles are passed; you will be able to see him every day; you may even make the marquis like him. Some time when you are out walking with him, and you meet the little darling, you can show him to the marquis and say, 'This is the little orphan that Pattie has adopted,' and when the marquis looks at his beautiful little face he will be quite sure to say, 'We must help her, we must do something for him.' He has the generosity of a prince, the marquis has. Then you can dress him prettily, send him toys, make him as happy as possible. It is a pleasant picture, my lady."

"Yes, very pleasant, Pattie; and if you can make it a reality, I will reward you."

She went at once to speak to the mistress of the house, who was only too well pleased to keep the little one, and who was delighted with the terms offered her. Pattie returned with the good news to her mistress.

"We can go to-morrow, my lady," she said, "if you like."

But Lady Laure looked at her, pleadingly.

"Let us stay until the day after, Pattie; you know he will never be quite so much my own again."

So it was arranged; and Pattie never forgot her lady's last day with her child. It was one of the saddest sights that could have been seen, one of the most pitiful; how she kissed it, caressed it, wept over it; the thousand injunctions she laid upon its nurse who was to be; the rewards she promised if it were well cared for; the piteous entreaties. Pattie Clarke thanked Heaven when the day was ended. She could not have borne such another. She never liked to remember the hour in which the mother parted from her child and turned away, with a white, set face, saying:

"I am ready now for anything."

She never uttered one word while Pattie took off the widow's garb and dressed her in a fitting costume. She never spoke during the journey to Paris; but when she stood once more in her magnificent chamber, she said to herself:

"The price—oh, my God, the price!"

Every one was struck with the improvement in her appearance. She received nothing but congratulations; there was great excitement over her return. She saw how wise Pattie had been in suggesting that they be settled at home before the marquis returned. When he did arrive, finding them there, and everything going on just as usual, he did not seem to remember even that his niece had been away from home. He was delighted with her appearance.

"How well you are looking, *ma belle*," he said. "I have never seen you so charming. You are quite well, and very happy?"

She assured him that she was both. He was delighted.

"I have won my lawsuit, Laure," he said. "And now, if the plan quite pleases you, I should like to spend the next year in traveling."

"Whatever pleases you, uncle," she said, "will please me."

"We will go through Germany and Switzerland on to Italy and Spain," said the marquis; "then we shall return to England in the spring of next year; and you shall be introduced to the great world as Lady Laure de Bourdon, my niece and heiress. Does the prospect please you?"

"Yes," she answered him; though her heart turned with a sudden pang of pain to her child.

She would not see him for another year—a whole year—then he would no longer be a baby.

"I shall have missed the sweetest part of his life," she said to herself, "the very sweetest."

Still there was no alternative. She sent Pattie to Combieres laden with everything that could possibly be required during her year's absence—money, clothes, presents—everything she could devise or imagine.

When that was done she had to attend to the ordering of a new and complete traveling wardrobe for herself. Then the marquis, with his valet, and Lady Laure, with her maid, started on the tour that was to complete her education.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BELLE OF SOCIETY.

Two years had passed since the marquis and his beautiful niece started on a tour that was to complete her education and fit her for the world. That tour had been prolonged from one year to two; Lady Laure had shown such quick, bright, keen intelligence, such a true taste for art, such wonderful artistic talent, that the marquis was quite determined to give her every advantage in his power. So that he lingered in all the large cities; he spared no expense, no trouble, no fatigue; he engaged masters for her wherever he went, and he himself superintended her education. She educated herself, too, after a fashion; she read a great deal; she found herself most happy when her thoughts were most busily occupied. The more she studied and thought, the higher her education became, the more she was horrified at what she herself had done; as her thoughts and ideas became more refined, as her perceptions beame more and more acute, the more clearly she saw the wrong she had done. It was too late now to undo it, with her cultivated tastes, her innate refinement, the way in which she had accustomed herself to every luxury, it was impossible now to go back to the old life—the life of poverty, of privation and obscurity. She never thought now of going back; her conscience had ceased to struggle; she had done wrong, she knew it, but there was no going back.

When she returned after that two years' tour, she was a different creature. Few would have recognized in her the country girl who had known no greater pleasure than the making of a cowslip ball. She had been a lovely girl, but she was now a magnificently beautiful woman. Her slender, graceful figure had developed into graceful symmetry; her face was beautiful, with a new and deeper beauty; the dainty bloom, the exquisite coloring, the perfection of feature, were all rendered still more lovely by the awakened soul and intellect. The marquis was simply enchanted with his niece. There was no one like her, he declared. He was proud of her, ambitious for her; he loved her and delighted in her loveliness.

She had almost succeeded in banishing all unpleasant thoughts from her mind; when the memory of Owen would obtrude she tried to be a philosopher.

"Why should I think of what is disagreeable to me," she said, "when no amount of thought can make any difference? The best thing I can do is to forget."

So she resolutely put memory away from her, and trampled down all thought of the simple past.

She never forgot the child. Pattie had been twice during the two years to see it, and each time had brought away a most flourishing account of it. The little one grew in beauty, strength and intelligence.

She never forgot him. People who talked to her, wondered why, at times, that sudden, wistful expression came in her eyes; why her beautiful face softened and grew tender. They little dreamed that at such times her heart had gone back to the little home under the vines, and the child who was there. Every day that passed made her happier over him; the time would soon come when Pattie could go for him, when she would be able to see him every day, to smother him with kisses and caresses, to give him clothes and toys—every day brought that happy time nearer.

Now the month of April had set in, and the marquis had gone with his beautiful niece to London, and she was to make her *début* in the great world. His mansion had been refurnished with the greatest magnificence; everything had been prepared; jewels fit for a queen had been purchased; nothing was wanting to make her triumph complete. She was to be presented at the Drawing-room on the twenty-third of April, and in the evening of this important day her

uncle presented her with a superb parure of diamonds; the court dress had come home, and the Duchess St. Maur, who was to present her, pronounced it perfect.

"I am impatient for the morrow," said the marquis; "I long to hear the verdict of the great world on my beautiful niece."

She bent her fair head and kissed him.

"I am indifferent to any other verdict, provided I have yours," she said; and he told her that she had that now.

He did not say that to flatter her, but to encourage her; he did not remember to have seen a more beautiful girl.

He was still more pleased when he saw her in her court dress; its splendor and magnificence suited her fair, queenly style of beauty. She was born to the purple; diamonds suited her. The marquis was charmed, but he felt, the least in the world, anxious, and felt that this ordeal, once over, all would be well.

He had no need for fear. Lady Laure was pronounced by competent judges to be the most beautiful lady the court of St. James could boast. Every one was talking about her; the papers all had something to say of her beauty, her jewels, her superb costume; in fact her presentation was a complete success. She took the whole world of London by storm. She was different from the ordinary run of *débutantes*; her beauty, her grace, her wit and bright intelligence, her quiet self-possession, her dignified calm, her brilliant repartee delighted every one. She was more like a queen of society than a girl just entering it.

The marquis smiled when, the day after the Drawing-room, he saw the tables covered with notes, invitations of all kinds.

"Look, Laure," he said, "these are all so many proofs of your success."

She laughed—it was very pleasant to be so admired. A few days more and she was in truth the queen of the London season.

The marquis was very proud, very exclusive; he did not allow her to accept every invitation that came.

"We must separate the chaff from the wheat, Laure," he would say; "no second-rate society for you."

So that the beautiful heiress of Fernholme was only to be met with in the very best houses and most exclusive

circles. A few days more and she was fairly afloat in the best society in England—her triumph could not have been greater or her success more certain. As she went, superbly dressed, and surrounded by admirers, from opera to ball, from soiree to soiree, she would ask herself was she the same Laure who had prepared Owen's breakfast and spent half the day in housework? As she walked among them imperially beautiful and imperially proud, she said to herself, what would they say, if they knew that she had a husband and child?

She had a legion of admirers—she was so gifted, so beautiful, so charming, that no man could resist her. She was not a flirt, and though at times there was a dash perhaps of coquetry about her, it was at once so dignified and sweet, that it only made her the more irresistible.

The marquis would try, laughingly, to count her admirers; but as yet, he declared the right man was not among them. There was Sir Boyd Overton, a wealthy baronet; the young Viscount Maurice, the Marquis of Sanlington, Lord Abbot and a host of others.

In her own mind, Lady Laure often compared them with Owen—Owen, with his grand head, his strong figure, and simple, noble face. He could never be like those white-handed aristocrats; but the question that rose to her mind most frequently was, whether he were not worth a dozen of them—whether the simple grandeur of his character did not raise him far above them—whether his true heart was not worth all this polish of manner? Yet of what use was it, even thinking of such things? Owen was dead to her, and she to him. None of her admirers pleased her a jot—one was too effeminate, another lacked intellect. The marquis smiled as fault after fault was discussed.

"He will have to be almost perfect, Laure," he said, "the man who wins you."

"I do not think I shall be very easily won, uncle," was the laughing reply.

Very often, when he had been talking to her in this fashion Lady Laure would ask herself what she should do if an admirer came, whom the marquis wished her to accept.

She knew that she could never marry any one. She was Owen Roden's wife and she could belong to no other; what should she do if her uncle insisted on it? Wait until the time did come, and then trust to her own inspirations.

Lord Abbot was the first to make her an offer, and she refused him at once. She told the marquis, who listened with a calm smile.

"He was not good enough for you, Laure," he said; "there is but one man in England to whom I should really like to give you."

"Who is that, uncle?" she asked.

"My dear Laure," he replied, "the slight knowledge I have of your charming sex enables me to say at once that I must decline telling you; you would instantly take a dislike to him. You do not know him, he has not been in London long, and we have not met him."

The next evening they went to a concert given by the Duchess St. Maur, and there, while Signora Bianca was singing one of the most beautiful airs, Lady Laure found herself more than once looking at a gentleman who stood at the other end of the room; she could not tell why he attracted her so much, unless it were that he, ever so slightly, resembled Owen.

He had a tall, strong figure, with a broad chest and grand shoulders; there was something that pleased her in the proud carriage, the half haughty grace; the face was a good one, proud and distinguished, the eyes dark and clear, a broad, thoughtful brow, dark clustering hair—Lady Laure liked his appearance.

"Uncle," she asked, "who is that gentleman speaking now to a lady in blue velvet—see."

She did not observe the quiet smile with which the marquis watched her animated face.

"He is a stranger," was the evasive reply.

But though he was a stranger, and though she had a circle of admirers round her, her eyes wandered to the tall figure and the proud, dark face.

She repeated her question, and this time Sir Boyd Overton answered it.

"That is Lord Ulverston," he replied. "It is something wonderful to see him at a concert; he does not care much for London society."

And neither of them guessed that it was a desire to see for himself the beautiful Lady Laure, of whom every one was talking, that had brought him there.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE STRATEGY OF THE MARQUIS.

LORD ULVERSTON, of Ulvers—the name struck her, just as the face and figure had done. She said to herself:

"If anything could have made Owen a gentleman, he would be like Lord Ulverston."

Then she reproached herself for being so foolish as to think of Owen—Owen was dead to her.

She thought a great deal about Lord Ulverston, but she spoke no word; and the marquis smiled more than once to himself as he saw how often her eyes wandered to him, but how little she said. Then she was somewhat piqued, too; once her eyes met Lord Ulverston's, and her face flushed crimson as she turned away.

"He will ask who I am, and then ask for an introduction to me," she said to herself.

But he did not—he did not look in her direction again, but after a time quitted the concert. The marquis smiled again as he saw that Lady Laure's eyes followed him even to the door.

"That will do," he said to himself; "nothing could be better."

After that Lady Laure thought a great deal about Lord Ulverston, in a careless kind of fashion. She wondered every day if she should see him—whether he would ever ask for an introduction to her. She saw him once or twice in the park—she saw him once at the opera; but he never asked for an introduction, although she saw that they both knew the same friends.

Once she was riding with her uncle in the Row, and they met him. Lord Ulverston bowed to her uncle, but did not look at her.

"You know that gentleman, uncle?" she said, with some little surprise.

"I was introduced to him last evening," was the brief reply.

"Do you like him, uncle—is he clever? He has a clever face. Do you care for him?"

"Yes," said the marquis, slowly; "I must say that I

liked him; I found him very clever. He is popular among men, though not, perhaps, with ladies."

"Why not with ladies, uncle?" she asked, quickly.

"He is not what is called a lady's man, Laure. He is one of the richest men in the peerage; he has two or three splendid estates; he has everything that a man can desire, but he has never shown any symptoms of wanting a wife, and the ladies are not quite pleased over it."

"Perhaps he does not want a wife," said Laure.

"No, he does not; that is why they are not pleased with him. He should want a wife; it seems selfish not to share his wealth and magnificence with some one."

"He may surely please himself," said Lady Laure.

The marquis continued:

"I do not think that is quite all; I am afraid Lord Ulverston is not quite as chivalrous as he might be. Rumor says that he infinitely prefers the society of gentlemen to that of ladies—that can not be right, Laure."

"He may surely please himself, uncle," she replied.

But all the same, she was just a little bit piqued; she thought to herself that if ever she was introduced to him, she would try to show him that some women in the world were well worth caring for; while the marquis congratulated himself on his diplomacy.

From the whole world Lord Ulverston, of Ulvers, one of the proudest, wealthiest and noblest men in England, was the one he had selected for his niece. He said to himself that he had been very clever, he had conducted the affair on the most diplomatic principles. "If I had said to her, Laure, I like Lord Ulverston, and I should be much pleased if he would fall in love with you, if I had said that —she is a true woman, my Laure—she would have taken a violent dislike to him and refused him. Now she is piqued; she will study to charm him, to please him, to captivate him, because she thinks he does not like women," in which opinion there is no doubt the marquis was right.

A few days later he said to his niece:

"Laure, make a very pretty toilet this evening. I have some friends coming to dine, as you know. I have asked Lord Ulverston to join us."

"Will he come?" she asked, quickly.

"I do not know, he half promised. Yes I think he will come. He improves on acquaintance, I think."

She had nothing to do during the rest of the day but think of her dress. The marquis liked giving a state dinner; it was a branch of hospitality in which he excelled. He kept one of the best cooks in England, and his dinners were of the most elegant kind. Those who received invitations considered themselves fortunate; it was seldom that one was refused.

So at last she was to meet Lord Ulverston, the only man who had shown no anxiety to know her, who did not care to see her, and would most certainly not fall in love with her. She was very anxious to impress—she would take but little notice of him; he should see there was one woman who did not trouble herself about winning him; yet she would do her best to look most beautiful and make him admire her.

Pattie found her lady difficult to please that day, white silk, white lace were tried, but in vain—they were too dead; of blue velvet she was tired. Pattie pleased her at last with a rich white brocade, on which small blue flowers were raised; a superb dinner dress cut so as to show the beautiful neck and white arms. In the golden brown waves of hair she placed white flowers but wore no jewels, except a superb diamond necklace. Lady Laure had never looked more beautiful.

When the marquis, quite delighted with his own diplomacy, brought Lord Ulverston to introduce him to his niece, he was quite charmed with her manner. Not for one moment did her lustrous eyes rest on his face, not one word did she utter more than etiquette demanded; then with a most charming and graceful bow, she turned from him to the next new arrival.

"She evidently does not care for the honor of my acquaintance," he said to himself; "she never even looked at me."

And that introduction struck him more than any other had done; women, as a rule, gave their kindest smiles and their brightest looks to the wealthy lord of Ulvers.

It fell to Lord Ulverston's lot to take Lady Laure in to dinner. As he sat by her, he was struck with wonder at her rare and delicate loveliness—the pure complexion, the dainty bloom. He wondered if the mind were as beautiful as the body and began to talk to her. Then, indeed, he was charmed with her wit, her intelligence, her animation

—he was delighted with her; and the next thing was, of course, that he fell in love with her.

Looking at her beautiful eyes he lost himself, and never found himself again. He was not willing to own it, even to his own heart. He had never cared much about the idea of marriage—he had never been in love; he had always prided himself on his strength of mind—he had wondered at men who choose to go mad for a woman's fair face; he had wondered at men who were ready to fling their fortunes and their lives under the feet of some beautiful, heartless woman. He had said to himself, a hundred times over, that no woman should ever break his heart or ruin his life—that when he married, it should be from philosophical motives, not from the false, weak sentiment that people call love.

He had been so brave, so proud, so cold; and now he had fallen more deeply, more entirely in love than one who had never barricaded himself with such resolutions. He was vexed over it—annoyed with himself; he would not at first believe in his bad fortune; he said to himself that he would cure himself of that nonsense, for he would not see her again; while she, on her side, was quite as proud and cold. It did not seem likely that they would ever agree; but the marquis was quite satisfied, he smiled more than once and owned to himself more than once that it was just what he expected.

Lord Ulverston was firm enough on that one point; he would not yield to such nonsense, and utter nonsense it was. He would keep away from Lady Laure, he would go so far as to own that she was dangerous; yet by some strange fatality it happened that he saw her every day, that he was always remembering something or other which made it necessary for him to call on the marquis; then it was so strange that after every conversation with Lady Laure he had something to send—some book or poem, or some piece of music that she had mentioned; he wondered at himself then, though he resolved not to go to the park, knowing that she would there be surrounded by hosts of admirers, still he felt himself impelled to go there, and did not know why.

Inch by inch he fought the way with himself; no man ever surrendered so unwillingly, and even when, after some weeks of struggle, he owned to himself that he was completely vanquished, he had not the least notion whether he

should ever be able to induce Lady Laure to look favorably on him; he owned to himself that he could not live without her, that life would be such a blank spent without her, he had not courage enough to face it. He could not tell whether she liked him or not; she was always proud and cold to him, but that, he argued to himself, might be his fault, because he was always reserved; but he had fancied once or twice that the beautiful face had softened to him, and that new music crept into the sweet voice when she spoke to him. He loved her all the better for her imperial pride and hauteur. He was so uncertain of what she felt, that he did not dare to mention his love to her; he thought he would consult the marquis first, and the marquis listened with a grave face as though he had not foreseen it all.

"I am glad that you have spoken to me, my lord," he said; "I will give you the best advice in my power; say nothing to my niece at present, but if you will come down to Fernholme I shall be delighted to see you, and then you will see better what your chances are."

So it was settled that when the season ended, Lord Ulverston should, after a time, go down to Fernholme. Never a word of this did the marquis tell his beautiful niece, not one word; when the season did end he told her jestingly that she had broken more hearts than any one else in London, and she had received more offers of marriage than would be made to any other; at which Lady Laure looked very proud, and said that marriage was a subject that did not particularly interest her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TWO WOMEN OUTWIT ONE MAN.

FERNHOLME had never looked more beautiful than in this leafy month of June, when the marquis, with Lady Laure, returned home.

The season was over, and all who had enjoyed its gayeties were desirous of seeking rest and repose. The summer was beautiful, bright and warm; the flowers in full blossom, the trees in full leaf, the birds sung as though no summer had ever been so charming. The grand old Abbey of Fernholme was at its brightest and best; the green ivy that clung to the gray towers was luxuriant; the scarlet creep-

ers, the woodbines, the climbing roses made it a picture of beauty.

Lady Laure's proud, bright eyes rested on it with a look of keenest satisfaction and pride; it would be hers some day, this grand, picturesque old pile of buildings, with all the wealth belonging to it.

The season had been to her one long triumph; it had exceeded even her wildest dreams; there seemed now no limit to her ambition. She was returning also, with her mind full of Lord Ulverston; not that she was in love with him; she would not for one moment admit that even to herself, but that he occupied her thoughts more than any one had done before.

Then she had another great source of happiness; she intended as soon as she was quite settled at Fernholme to send for her boy. She was longing to see him, she thirsted for a look at his face and the sound of his voice. With her devoted and faithful maid, Pattie, she had arranged everything even to the words that were to be spoken.

The marquis had decided with his niece that they would have one week of perfect rest, before inviting any visitors, then she would be able to recruit herself, to make up for the late hours and the loss of sleep. Nothing could have suited Lady Laure better.

"It will seem just like old times, uncle, to be here alone and together," she had said.

"Then, after three days had passed, she decided that it was quite time. She began her plans for bringing home her little son. One morning the marquis was unusually late at breakfast, and she, quite against her rule, waited for him. He was pleased by the little act of attention. They talked and she amused him greatly by little anecdotes of her partners and all she had seen or heard in town. While she was talking to him busily, her maid, Pattie, entered the room, with an open letter in her hand and signs of great agitation on her face. She drew back with a deep courtesy when she saw the marquis.

"I beg your pardon, my lady," she said, "I thought you were alone." Then she added: "Could you, my lady, be good enough to spare me five minutes? I am sorry to trouble you, but I have had bad news."

Lady Laure rose from her seat.

"Go to my room, Pattie," she said; and when she had gone, she turned to her uncle:

"I hope there is nothing wrong—anything much the matter," she said. "I should be quite lost without Pattie."

"She is a valuable servant," said the marquis. "If it should be any kind of money trouble, either for herself or her friends, remember my purse is yours, Laure."

She thanked him, and quitted the room. She was absent for perhaps half an hour, then returned with a grave face.

"I am in trouble now, uncle," she said, bending down to kiss him; "I am afraid Pattie will have to leave me."

"I hope not," said the marquis.

"So do I," re-echoed his beautiful niece, with a sigh. "I should be greatly distressed; she understands my style, and she has such exquisite taste. You are pleased when I look well dressed; but if Pattie goes, I shall never be well dressed again."

"Then she must stay, Laure, decidedly. What is the matter with her? Why does she want to go?"

"It is a long, sad story; she had a sister who married young, and whose husband died when we were abroad a year ago; now the sister herself is dead and has left a little boy about two years old. Pattie must go to him. She will have to adopt the child, I suppose, and bring it up as her own. Her sister asked her to do so."

"That is awkward," said the marquis; "but, Laure, I do not see there is any necessity of Pattie's leaving you."

She saw that if she managed well, he would be the first to suggest that the child should be brought there.

"Do you not, uncle? Well, if you can be clever enough to suggest a plan by which I can keep my useful maid, I shall be very glad indeed."

"How old do you say the child is, Laure?"

She looked thoughtfully at him. He little dreamed how her heart was beating, and how the words seemed to burn her lips as they left them.

"Two years old, I believe."

"Then there is really no need whatever for Pattie leaving you. She can go and bring the child with her."

She was compelled to wait a few minutes; her heart beat

so quickly that she could not speak. Then she looked at her uncle calmly.

"We could not do with a child here," she said.

"No, not here—not at Fernholme; but surely, among the farmers' wives Pattie can find one who would take the boy and bring him up, if she were well paid for it. You can increase the girl's wages so as to enable her to do so. Ring for Pattie. I will propose the plan to her myself."

Lady Laure rang, and sent for Pattie, to whom the marquis propounded his kindly scheme. The maid seemed delighted, and thanked him over and over again. He did not notice how pale his niece had grown; her heart and conscience alike reproached her. When the maid had gone, she threw her white hands around his neck.

"How good you are to me," she said. "How kind; you do anything to please me."

"Certainly. I love you—will do anything for you, Laure."

And as her beautiful head rested for one minute on that kindly heart, she thought to herself she would give her life never to have deceived him.

So it was all arranged. Pattie went into deep mourning, and all the household heard that her sister was dead. In three days from then Pattie started to fetch the child. He was to remain with her for a day or two at Fernholme, until a home was found for him. The housekeeper, Mrs. Pelton, who was very much interested in the matter, volunteered to go to King's Wynne and seek from among the tenants there one who would be best suited to take the care of the child. My lady did not appear in the matter at all. Pattie was absent four days, and each day Lady Laure contrived to appear not so nicely dressed as usual. Even the marquis noticed it. She laughed when he spoke of it, and said Pattie would soon return.

She had something to bear. No one knew with what agony of longing she was waiting for that return. She trembled at the thought of seeing her child; yet she longed to see him with an intensity no words could tell. She remembered the tiny beautiful baby face. What would it be like now?

She was just sitting down to dinner when the footman brought word that Mrs. Clark—as the servants called Pattie—had arrived. She dare not ask the question that

trembled on her white lips. The man added that Mrs. Clark had brought the little boy with her. Her first wild impulse was to run to him, to catch him in her arms, to smother him with kisses; but she was compelled to control herself. Her own child was safe there under her roof, yet it might be hours before she saw him. The marquis wondered at the high spirits and animation of his niece.

"She has life enough and nerve enough for twenty women," he said. "No wonder that she is so popular."

And that night she made herself more charming than ever. She sung to him, talked to him, until he was delighted with her.

"Pattie has returned, uncle," she said, when she had bade him good-night, "but I have not seen her yet. I will have a toilet that will delight you to-morrow."

She could hardly control herself until she reached Pattie's room—her own little child, the lovely, rosy baby she had left in such anguish and such tears, she was to see him again.

She opened the door of Pattie's room and the faithful maid was there to welcome her. Lady Laure looked at her; she could not speak.

"Yes, my lady," she said, "he is here, safe and well, and beautiful. You must not cry out when you see him."

Then she went a step further and saw him lying fast asleep on Pattie's bed, the golden brown curls lying on the white pillow, the lovely little face rosy with slumber, the pink hands clasping a little wooden soldier.

She was heartless, vain, proud, and cold; but when she saw the little one she fell on her knees by his side, sobbing and praying that Heaven would be merciful to her, for she was a wretched sinner.

She covered the pink hands and the beautiful limbs with kisses. She kissed the face, the sweet open lips, the brown curls.

"My darling, my heart's darling," she cried.

"You should see him with his eyes open, my lady," said Pattie. "He is beautiful as the morning. But, oh, my lady, what do you think?"

"What, Pattie?" asked Lady Laure.

There was a smile on Pattie's face and a tear in her eye as she answered:

"My lady, the child speaks French—just the few little words he says are all French."

Mistress and maid looked at each other in comic dismay. "He will soon forget it," said Lady Laure. "Pattie, could you not carry him to my room to-night, that I may have him to myself for a few hours?"

"If you think it safe, my lady, I will do it."

"Of course it is safe. Why should it not be quite safe? I must have him, Pattie; I must hold him in my arms quite close. I must. Do you remember how long it is since I have seen him—and he is my own, own child. I must have him."

Pattie was only too pleased to indulge her. When the house was all quiet the child was carried to his mother's room. Her delight and ecstasy over him brought the tears to Pattie's eyes.

There was never anything half so beautiful on earth as this, her own child.

Her delight was increased when he opened his eyes and looked at her; but then the eyes were like hers, and the face was just like Owen's.

CHAPTER XXV.

A MOMENTOUS QUESTION.

"I SHOULD like to see your little protégé, Pattie," said the marquis, kindly.

He was standing on the lawn on a bright June morning. Lady Laure was with him. She had been feeding a beautiful peacock, whose superb feathers were spread in the morning sun. Pattie had come with some message to her mistress.

"I should like to see him," repeated the marquis, and Pattie went at once to find the child.

She brought him back, looking beautiful as the morning itself, his glossy curls brushed out, his rosy face glowing, his little black frock showing his beautiful limbs. Pattie led him up to the marquis, while Lady Laure, white even to the lips, stood watching the scene.

"He is a lovely child," said the marquis. "Shake hands, little one."

He took the pink, plump hand in his own; then, won by

the child's smile, bent down and kissed the little face, while Lady Laure said to herself wonders would never cease. If he knew whose child he was caressing.

"It is years since I spoke to a child of this age," said the marquis; then he started in amazement; the child said something, and he cried out:

"Why, Pattie, the boy speaks French."

For one moment it seemed to Lady Laure that the earth and the sky met. Then she heard Pattie say, quite calmly:

"Oh, yes, my lord; his father was a Frenchman; he will soon learn to speak English, though."

"His eyes remind me of some one, I can not tell whom," said the marquis. "Laure, have you seen this little one?"

She did not turn away from the beautiful, proud bird she was feeding; the fact was she did not dare to trust herself near the boy in the marquis's presence.

"Yes, I have seen him," she replied, quietly.

The marquis was just a little disappointed that she did not show a little more enthusiasm for the pretty babe. He was kinder than usual to atone for it. He placed a golden sovereign in each pink palm; he patted the curly head, and kissed the pretty face.

"You must bring him to see me from time to time, Pattie," he said. "I shall be interested in seeing how he gets on."

Then, when the maid had taken the child away, he said to Laure:

"Do you dislike children, Laure?"

He asked the question in a grave tone of voice, as though he were half displeased.

"No," she answered, trying to speak carelessly, "I like them well enough."

He watched her for a few minutes in silence, wondering if one so beautiful could really be, as he had at times thought her, cold of heart. Then he said to himself, No, it was only her manner. Her heart was warm enough and in the right place.

"That is such a fine child," he said. "I should like you to take a little notice of him; it would please Pattie, I am sure."

He would have thought her mad a few hours later on, had he seen her kissing the boy and talking to him. The

housekeeper had found him a delightful home, at a pretty, quaint, old-fashioned farm-house between Fernholme and Ladywell. It was kept by a widow, a comely, gentle, kindly woman, who desired nothing better than the continual presence of a child. The farm was called "The Hollies," and Mrs. Kean, who managed it, had no children of her own. Pattie was more than satisfied when she took the child.

"He will be as happy, my lady, as a king," she said.

And so he was, although he wept sorely at parting from the beautiful lady who loved him so passionately. The little boy was soon quite at home. No one ever heard my lady speak of him; she never even looked at him in any other person's presence, but she atoned for it when they were alone. She continued to see him almost every day, either when she went out for her drive or when he was brought to the Abbey by Pattie.

The sultry month of July came round, and one morning the marquis received a letter that made him look anxiously at his niece; it was from Lord Ulverston, saying that he was tired of his suspense and waiting, and with the permission of the marquis he would at once go to Fernholme.

"Whatever be my fate," he wrote, "it will be more easy to bear than this suspense."

What would Lady Laure say? The marquis could form no idea; he looked at her anxiously; she had never been so beautiful, and it seemed to him that her face had grown tender and more softened. At last he spoke.

"Laure," he said, "Lord Ulverston is coming to see us."

Her face grew crimson.

"She does care for him," thought my lord; "but she is too proud to show it. I shall stand aside, and let them make their own terms. I will not interfere."

Lady Laure thought a great deal of what he had said. Lord Ulverston coming? Was it, could it really be, because he cared for her? The Abbey was filled with guests, the marquis had been very liberal with his invitations. From morning until night there were continual scenes of gayety; there were picnics to the woods, boating on the River Rea, garden parties, every variety of summer entertainments, and Lady Laure was queen of all. The whole country-side were at one time or another invited to Fernholme, and

everybody there acknowledged Lady Laure as the most beautiful and fascinating of women.

The moment she saw Lord Ulverston, before she spoke to him, she knew by instinct why he had come. The dark, haughty face was full of passion, the dauntless eyes seemed to say to her:

"I have fought against you and against myself; I am vanquished and I mean to win you."

Whenever they looked at her or followed her, those eyes said that, and Lady Laure knew their language by heart, and learned to droop her own before them. More than one beautiful woman among the guests would have been pleased to attract the notice of Lord Ulverston. He was decidedly the best match in England. They were well content to sing to him, to dance with him, to wander with him in the gloaming, to listen to his compliments; they were willing to praise and to flatter him, to share his views and opinions, but he won none of these concessions from his lady-love; she stood quite aloof. When he spoke, she answered him briefly; if he asked her to sing, she was always engaged; if he asked her to dance, she was tired; if he asked her to ride or to drive, she always had some other engagement; yet he did not despair.

"If she looked at me when she gave such replies, I should be frightened," he thought; "but she does not; her eyes droop from mine, and she cares for me, I am sure. My beautiful queen. There is no one like her."

He waited whole days, and could never find the opportunity that he sought; she seemed always to evade or avoid him. At length, one morning, going quite by accident into the conservatory, he found her there. It was one of Lady Laure's peculiarities that she never cared for flowers. Perhaps they reminded her too forcibly of that she wanted to forget. She had gone there to read in luxurious peace the third volume of a book that greatly interested her. Most of their visitors had gone out either riding or driving, but she had preferred her book and the quiet, cool conservatory.

She did not hear Lord Ulverston enter, nor did she know that he was there until he uttered her name.

"Lady Laure," he said, "I can hardly believe in my good fortune to find you here and alone." She gave him one quick, keen glance, then she knew that he would say

what he had come to say, and that nothing she could do would prevent him. Her eyes drooped, and the long silken lashes fell on her face; she folded her white hands and laid them on her book. "I have come to Fernholme," he said, "with the one intention of asking you to be my wife; but you have been so cold and so reserved that any other man would have been daunted. Will you listen to me, Lady Laure?"

"It would not be polite to say no," she replied, with the least trace of a smile.

"I do not care about politeness," he said; "but I fancy that you are willing for me to speak."

He looked so strong, so tall, so handsome, that any woman must have been flattered by his love. He stood by her side, his dark, proud face softened into unutterable tenderness.

"I loved you, Lady Laure," he said, "the first moment I saw you. You are the only woman I ever loved, or ever shall love. Will you be my wife?"

She listened calmly. The thing that struck her most in his wooing was how it resembled Owen's. Owen had just that fashion of standing erect by her side, and of saying the most loving words to her. Lord Ulverston little knew that he owed his patient hearing to his likeness to another.

"Will you be my wife, Lady Laure?" he repeated. "I might woo you in more tutored language. I might quote poetry, after the fashion of men who make love to all the pretty women they meet; but I have never made love before; it is all new to me, and I am perhaps awkward at it."

She could not repress a smile. She had had love made to her in all kinds of ways. This seemed stranger than ever.

"Will you be my wife, Lady Laure?" he asked again.

Then she looked up at him.

"I can not give you any answer, Lord Ulverston," she said. "I have not made up my mind as to whether I shall ever marry or not."

He bent his head.

"Will you try to love me, Lady Laure?" he asked, gently.

Her face softened.

"I will think of it," she replied.

"Ah, believe me, you should never repent it—never. I love you so dearly, all my life and my heart has gone into my great love for you. I will make you the happiest woman in the wide world."

She thought to herself that that would never be possible; she might be anything else, but happy—never.

He continued:

"Will you think about it, Lady Laure? I love you so well, so dearly, words seem to me foolish and weak when I try to make them express my passionate love."

"I will think of it," she said, and, even as he stood there talking to her, she was thinking of Owen's love and Owen's words:

"I would follow you, and die like a dog—humbly at your feet."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A BRIDE FOR THE SECOND TIME.

THE marquis, going one fine morning into his library, was surprised to find his niece sitting there waiting for him.

She rose as he entered, and in answer to his laughing remark, said:

"It is so impossible of finding an opportunity of speaking to you, uncle, while we have so many visitors, that I have determined to make my opportunity."

He told her that he was always pleased to see her. He had one or two very important letters to write for this post, and then they could talk.

"You look very thoughtful, Laure," he said, suddenly raising his eyes from his paper.

"I have something to think of, uncle," was the quiet reply.

Then, when his letters were finished, he went over to her, and sitting down by her side, said:

"Now, my Laure, tell me why you are thoughtful, why you have sought me, and what you wish to speak about?"

"Very comprehensive," said Laure, with a smile. "I can soon do it, uncle. I am thinking seriously about the one thing in this world which is supposed to interest women most—marriage. I want to know if you really wish me to be married—if you really desire it."

"Yes," said the marquis, "I do wish it."

"But, uncle, why? I am so happy here with you. I could not be happier. If I marry I must go to some strange home and leave you, which I should not like half so well as this. I shall never love any husband half so well as I love you."

He laughed and caressed the white hand he held.

"Why need it be, uncle? Let me be always with you."

He looked at her.

"Do you not want to marry, Laure?" he asked.

"No," she answered, "I do not. I should very much prefer to remain single. I do not want to be married. Let me remain always with you."

"My dearest Laure, I should like it well enough; but it can not be—it must not be. You are literally the last of the De Bourdons; you can not in this matter please yourself; you are compelled to marry; the nobility of our name imposes this obligation on you."

"You really mean it, uncle," she said, gravely.

"Certainly I do, Laure; it is part, and the most necessary part, of my scheme. Most assuredly I mean it."

"Then there is nothing for it, but for me to obey," she said. "I must marry if you really desire it. I may as well tell you, uncle, that I have had an offer of marriage."

"You have had a great many, Laure," he said, laughingly.

"But this one I have had lately—two days ago. I did not answer it. I would say, "No," if you were willing for me to remain here always with you. I gave no answer, but waited until I had spoken to you. It was Lord Ulverston who asked me to be his wife."

"Do you love him, Laure?" asked her uncle.

"As well he as another," she replied. "If you say it is my duty to marry, and you wish it, I think he is the most eligible of all my admirers."

"You speak coolly, Laure."

"I feel coolly. I want to live always with you; I do not care about marriage, but if you wish it—"

"I do wish it, and if Lord Ulverston has made you an offer, I say frankly that you could not do better than accept it. Such a marriage will please me very much."

"Then I must say 'Yes;' you would like me to say yes?"

"Certainly I should. But, Laure, I can not understand you. Do you know that Lord Ulverston is one of the most sought-after men in England? There is not a duchess who would not gladly give him her loveliest daughter. He could marry the greatest heiress in England—and yet you treat him so coolly."

"It is a change for him after so much flattery, uncle," she said.

"Ah, well, there is something most certainly in that; but you yourself, Laure—you puzzle me. Why are you so much unlike other girls—so cold of heart, so quietly proud? Lord Ulverston is handsome enough to win the heart of any girl; he has a most charming manner. I know no one whom I admire so much. He loves you, and that in itself is the greatest compliment he can pay you; yet you receive his love so coldly; it does not seem to please you. I should hardly have thought there was a woman living who would not have loved him for his own sake. Why are you so different from other women, Laure?"

"Why?" She repeated the word with quivering lips; "why?" and the memory of the strong, loving young husband she had forsaken came over her with a sharp pang. "I can not tell why, uncle—every one has peculiarities, I have mine. So, then, I may take it now as your decided wish that I should marry Lord Ulverston."

The marquis looked anxiously and wonderingly in that beautiful face.

"If you can be happy with him; but if there is any one whom you love better, I would neither force nor persuade you, Laure. You shall please yourself."

"There is no one whom I prefer, uncle," she said, slowly.

"Then we will consider it settled," he said. "Try to love him, Laure. After all, wealth and position are a great deal, but it requires a little love to brighten one's life. Try to love him a little, my dear."

She bent her beautiful head until it touched his shoulder, and there rested for two or three minutes, while the marquis wondered to himself how it was that she, so young, so beautiful, should be cold in manner and hard of heart. After a few minutes she stood up.

"I thank you, uncle," she said, "for your patience in

listening to me. I have my answer ready now. I am to say yes."

"Say it kindly, Laure," he pleaded.

"I will—I will, indeed. I never mean to be anything except kind. I am unfortunate if I have a cold manner."

As he looked at her, the marquis thought that perhaps the very calmness of her manner, so imperial in its grace, had been the charm that won him.

So now again her destiny lay in her own hands; she had tried to evade the decision by referring it to her uncle. She knew that the wrong she had done already was deadly enough; but that if she doubled it by marrying, her crime would be terrible.

Then she reasoned with herself falsely enough; she said that her old self was dead, the self that married Owen was dead; indeed there had never been such a person, her whole identity was changed; Owen Roden had married Laure Knowles, as he believed the daughter of a poor woman, an untaught, obscure, penniless girl; he would never have thought of marrying Lady Laure de Bourdon. So, the old self being dead, she was at liberty to please herself; so she argued with herself, so she tried to reason and to argue with herself; but though she tried hard to reason with herself, to argue with herself, to convince herself, yet it was all a dead failure; she knew that she was on the brink of a terrible crime—a crime before God and man, one that was punished severely by the law.

She knew it, she made no false excuses. After a time, the hideous reality of her sin became clearer to her every day; she would not think of it, the old self was dead. She declared her new self should do as she would. She felt quite secure, no one would ever discover her secret, it was safe as possible; she would be more safe still if she were married; once Lady Ulverston, of Ulvers, and she should never know the sensation of fear again.

So when, after some days, Lord Ulverston mentioned the subject to her again, she was ready with her answer, and greatly to his joy, not a little to his surprise, that answer was, "Yes." "Yes," given with calm lips, that did not tremble over the word, with a face that neither flushed, nor changed, nor paled.

"Lady Laure," he said, after a pause, "do you love me? You are very good, you have promised to marry me,

but I am wondering if you love me. It is your love I want."

The handsome face and pleading voice touched her heart; he loved her so deeply and so well, this man who asked her to be his wife. She looked up at him suddenly.

"I will try to love you," she said. "I will try to make you happy;" and as she said the words, there came to her an idea how she could yet make her life good and beautiful. She would marry him, she would be a good wife; she would so faithfully discharge the duties of her high position, that she should in that way atone for the wrong she had done.

An idea that even in its falseness gave her some pleasure. She liked to dwell upon it; she liked to think how much good it would be in her power to do—how many she could relieve and assist; how well she might educate her boy. There would be no limit to her power of doing good.

Lord Ulverston saw the sudden light that came to her face, and fondly believed that it was love for him brought it there. Then his only misgiving died away; he had almost feared that she was too proud and too cold to love; but now, with that light on her face, with that smile on her lips, he could doubt no more. She loved him, and they would be happy.

The news of the engagement gave great satisfaction; every one thought it a most suitable marriage, and the marquis openly professed himself delighted; he said, more than once, that if he had to choose from the whole world, Lord Ulverston was the man he should have chosen.

The marriage was to take place in the spring of the year following. Lord Ulverston said, with a sigh of resignation, he knew it was quite useless to ask for it before then. The settlement and the wedding *trousseau* must take some long time. One can not be married without some proper formalities.

During those long months of waiting Lady Laure learned to love him; his noble character, his loyal, true disposition, his intellect and high principles won her highest esteem, and then followed her love; but it was a very different love from that which she had given Owen Roden. This was an affection of slow growth, founded solely on esteem and respect, an affection that nothing could change or make less.

Then when the time of waiting was over, and the wed-

ding-day came, all England read of the wonders and festivities that followed. Bride and bridegroom went to the beautiful old Castle of Ulvers, where Lady Ulver was soon beloved and revered. Pattie went with her, and a home was found for Pattie's adopted child at one of the lodge-gates, and there for some years the Lady of Ulvers had a bright, beautiful, happy life.

CHAPTER XXVII.

OWEN'S BOOK.

OWEN RODEN had no suspicion of the blow that was to fall on him; that his beautiful young wife had thoughts in which he did not share, or interests apart from his, or a longing for anything more than simple life and simple happiness, never occurred to him. He had worked very hard to make that little home pretty for her; he had rescued her from poverty and hard toil; he was working with all his strength to make a better position for her, and it never occurred to him to think that she was anything but content and happy.

She was so young—almost a child—and she loved him very much; she was very lovely and gentle. He amused himself at times by thinking what a magnificent woman she would make in the years to come. She had not finished growing yet; she might be several inches taller even, and he laughed heartily at the idea; then he should have a beautiful home for her, for simple, honest, noble Owen had his ambitions.

He was born to be a great botanist. Had he been the child of wealthy parents, had he received a good education, the chances are that his name would be enrolled with those of great scholars; as it was, he had to fight his way through mists of ignorance; he found great stumbling-blocks that it was hard to get over; yet his courage and his perseverance were so great; he wrote of wonderful things that he had seen and heard about flowers, and their habits, their tempers, and ways, but that which he wrote was often misspelled, and required to be put into proper shape.

Every one has a talent of some kind, if he will but use it; Owen had more than that, he had genius, but it was all for flowers, plants, trees; he seemed to live in a world

full of them, a world which held nothing else. To the marvels of architecture, of painting, of sculpture, he was quite blind; he understood nothing of science, less of literature, but there was nothing in the lives of flowers that puzzled him; he knew their names, their homes, the life they liked; he knew all about them, he was quite king of their kingdom. As a child, he had loved and studied them; as a man he did the same. He could not draw a straight line if left to himself, but he could always sketch quite correctly a leaf or a flower.

So day by day he had patiently plodded on; he had written his chapters on the habits of flowers, on the formation of leaves, on the growth of trees; and one day when a great botanist came to Aylmer Hall, Lord Cardin brought him to see Owen Roden's collection of wild flowers, and from their conversation the great botanist desired to see those written chapters. When he had done so, the great man declared that Owen had written a wonderful book. Owen smiled with the simplicity that belongs to all great genius.

"I am afraid the grammar and spelling are very bad, sir," he said.

"I will make all that right," said the man of science; "trust it to me, I will correct it, and you will find that you have written one of the most wonderful books of the day. Go on with your studies, and I prophesy a bright career for you."

Lord and Lady Cardin had both been very much struck with those words: Lord Cardin, because he had a simple, honest liking for the man; Lady Cardin, because it gratified her pride that they should have a genius in their service, because it would please her in after years to hear people speak of Lord Cardin's head-gardener.

So Owen worked until the love came that seemed to change his whole life, until he saw the lovely young face of Laure, the flower of flowers, and from that moment she became the first object in life with him. Different men have different loves: he was one quite by himself. The very simplicity and purity of his life, the poetry of it, made it different from any other; it had not been tainted by evil companions, or shadowed by sin, or passed in the evil contact of great cities. It had been spent under the blue sky, in the grand, free air, always studying flowers, nothing but

flowers. There were whole days when he heard no sound except the song of birds and the music of the wind; it made him a poet even without his own knowledge, and that poetry was the life of his love. A timid love at first, without any hope in it. He could never think for one moment that Laure would care for him, but he delighted in worshiping her. He found out after a time how poor and helpless they were, this mother and daughter. Then the true nobility of his nature showed itself. He contrived to help them in a hundred ways, but it was all so cleverly done that it seemed to them that they were conferring favors, and he receiving them. How he worshiped the lovely light-haired girl, worshiped her from afar off; to sit and look at her was delight enough for him. If she spoke to him, the honest, handsome face flushed burning red. If in passing him her dress touched him, or her hand rested for half a moment in his, the great strong frame trembled. How he loved her. It is pitiful to see the love of a man given so lavishly to a woman.

Even after they were married he could hardly believe his own good fortune. That she cared for him, loved him, was willing to bear his name, share his home, his love, his life, was most wonderful to him; to say that he worshiped her, had for her the purest, the most passionate, the deepest love that filled a man's heart, is little enough; he lived for her, for her he worked, studied, hoped, and planned; for the first time he was anxious to make a name, to make riches; he would look at her and wonder that he had won so great a treasure, wonder that his life was gladdened and brightened by one so beautiful and gifted.

He worshiped her so entirely himself, that it never entered his mind to think perhaps she loved him less. He had never been jealous of her; they knew no one, they had few acquaintances, no friends, no relations; there was no possibility of comparing himself with others, for he never saw any one. He had implicit faith in her; he could have sooner imagined one of the angels of Heaven betraying him, one of the stars of heaven falling, than Laure going wrong; he had never once associated Laure with wrong in his own mind, he could not imagine her anything but perfect.

For a few months they were very happy, until the great temptation of her life came to her.

Then he began to notice a little change in her; it was not much, but that she had grown so thoughtful. Up to this time she had always been so quick, so anxious; he had always found his home so well attended to, his own wants so well provided for; now, day after day, he went home, and Laure had forgotten his dinner, forgotten his tea; he would find her buried in thought, starting at sight of him. She had always been so proud of him, so light of heart, and so gay; she had gone about the little house, singing with a clear, sweet voice, and now she was silent; she had enjoyed talking to him about their future, about the great book, which was to be called "Flower Life," and which she hoped so earnestly would bring him fame and money; now she never spoke of the future, and when he did so she had a fashion of clasping her white arms round his neck and hiding her face on his breast. Still he was not the least anxious over her; he had never, even ever so faintly, suspected her of wrong, nothing could have ever induced him to do that; but he was puzzled. He thought about her very much one evening when he was in the woods; for the first time that day he felt uncomfortable about her; she looked so languid, so listless, so far from her bright, natural self. He thought so much about her, that he came to the conclusion that she was not well, that she wanted some change.

"She has had such a dull life, my bonny, bright bird," he said to himself. "She felt the shock of her mother's death; then I bring her here and shut her up in a lonely cottage, where all day long she hears nothing but the birds singing; she wants a change of scene, and she shall have it by some means or other. I will find the means, and I will take her down by the sea; she shall see the beautiful, fresh sea, and that will cure her; the first whisper of a breeze will bring a lovely flush of color to her sweet face, and she will laugh heartily as the waves roll in. I long to see her there."

He longed to tell her of the pleasure in store. How she would look up at him, and thank him; how she would delight in the prospect. He laughed to himself, he wished that he had thought of it before.

"I reproach myself," he said; "I have been so happy, I have been so lost in my love for her, that I have neglected what I ought to have attended to. After her mother's

illness and death I ought not to have brought her here. She should have gone away at once; it is not too late—she shall go now."

Even the flowers lost their attraction this afternoon, he longed to be at home.

He was walking quickly through the park, his hands filled with blossoms of all kinds—the most wonderful and beautiful variety—when he suddenly met Lord Cardin.

"I am glad to have met you, Owen," said my lord; "I have a letter for you, containing good news about 'Flower Life.' Read it for yourself."

It was good news; the publishers, to whom the work, in its revised and corrected form had been submitted, were delighted with it, and made him an offer for it which caused Owen to open his eyes and look at Lord Cardin.

"Surely, my lord," he said, "the trifles I noted down about flowers can never be worth all that."

"If they were not worth it, you would not get it, Owen," said Lord Cardin. "Can you come up to the Hall? I should like to talk matters over with you."

But no, not for fifty such offers would he have neglected Laure; he must go home at once and tell her that he was going to take her to the beautiful, restless sea. He excused himself, and Lord Cardin appointed another time. Laure was before all the world with him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"OH, GOD! MY WIFE."

ALL the way home, through the lovely, laughing summer woods, he was singing aloud for sheer happiness. If, indeed, he should receive all this money, what would he not buy for Laure? If his sketches of flowers, and notes upon them, were to bring him in so large a sum, he saw a brilliant future before him, for he had more to write on the same subject.

What would Laure say? The way home had never seemed so long before. What could he not buy for Laure? His imagination could go no further than a black silk dress—yes, she should have that; her beautiful figure would show to advantage in a silk dress. How proud he should be of her. Nay, he would do more than that; he would

take her to Rosethorpe, where she should buy just what she would; and simple Owen laughed as he thought of her delight.

She should have all the money, all for herself; he wanted none of it, and he was strong, he cared nothing for the things that pleased her, his darling.

Ah, there was the cluster of chestnut trees; he should be at home now in two minutes. He stopped, laden as his hands were, to gather a lovely wild rose. Laure loved wild roses; he would take her this.

There was the little cottage, with the roses laughing in at the window. A passionate flush rose to his face as he thought of his beautiful young wife; one moment more and he should clasp her in his arms.

"Laure," he cried, even before he opened the door. "Laure, darling, come here."

There was no answer.

"She does not hear," he thought.

With his flower-laden hands he opened the door. The little kitchen was empty, no fire, no tea, no loving wife, no cheerful greeting, no tender words; only an empty room that had something quite chill about it.

He placed his flowers on the table, and went into the little parlor; it was empty.

"Laure," he called again; "Laure, darling, where are you?"

No answer; and Owen for one moment felt slightly anxious—he feared she felt ill, and had gone up to her room. He was there in less than half a second, feeling terribly alarmed when he saw the bed empty.

"Laure," he cried, and there was nothing but blank silence.

Still no idea, not even the faintest, of anything wrong crossed his mind. He was slightly puzzled, and slightly sorry, he had been so eagerly anxious to see her. He decided in his own mind that she had gone to Rosethorpe, as she very often did, to purchase something for the house. Well, it would be a disappointment, certainly, it could not be otherwise, but he must wait; she would not be long; the shades of evening were drawing in, and Laure never stayed out late.

He looked round for the faintest possible sign. Instead of Laure preparing for him, he must prepare for her. He

knew how to do that; he made a cheerful fire, made the little kitchen look bright instead of dull, and then prepared tea for Laure, who was never more to return.

He knew just what she liked, and how she liked to see fruit and flowers on the table, how she liked the golden honey. He made the little table very pretty, then he went to the door and looked across the woods; there was no sign of her. The shadows were getting long on the grass, the wood-pigeons were cooing, the birds were singing their vesper hymn, the buds and blossoms were closing, the world seemed to be in hushed silence and sweetest rest. The sun had set, and in the western sky great crimson clouds were sinking. Where was Laure?

There was a wide opening in the trees where the cluster of chestnuts stood. She would come from there soon; he should see her beautiful face smiling at him, hear the dear voice, with its soft, sweet music. So he stood and waited, while the future years unrolled themselves before him, so bright, so full of happiness. Ah, well, but for the delusions of life, it would be hard to live.

He stood for more than an hour: the cooing of the ring-doves grew fainter, the birds were growing tired, the shadows grew longer and darker. Still she did not come. He said to himself that he would go to Rosethorpe to meet her. He closed the door, and started—not anxious, yet wondering why she was so long. At every sound, at every turn, he expected to see her; but there was no Laure. When he reached Rosethorpe he went to the shops where he knew Laure dealt, but no one had seen her; he walked slowly through the streets, hoping to meet her; then, as it grew later and darker, he said to himself that he had missed her; she would be at home now. As he went back, he called at the old-fashioned toll-gate, where both himself and his wife were well known, to inquire whether she had passed there.

No; they were quite sure they had not seen Mrs. Roden that day.

He fancied then that she must have gone somewhere else. If she had gone to Rosethorpe, she would be at home and waiting for him. He walked as quickly as he could. The soft, sweet, summer darkness lay over the woods; there was no sound as he hurried through them, save the faint stirring of the sleepy leaves. She would surely be at

home waiting for him, with tender words. But no; he saw at a glance the little house lay still in darkness; there was no fire, no light, no beautiful face with words of welcome, no Laure!

He re-entered the little room; it was just as he had left it; she had not been home; he felt anxious and troubled, but as yet he had no doubt, not even the faintest. He came to the conclusion that she had been sent for. She might—it was just possible—have gone to the Hall; perhaps Lady Cardin had sent for her; he could go to the lodge gates and inquire. He went. But no; the woman who kept the lodge gates assured him that Mrs. Roden had not passed that day.

Where was she? In the name of Heaven, where was she? He hurried back; but the house was still empty. What had become of her? He waited until midnight; still there was no sign, no sound. He went into her room and looked round it. He saw all her clothes, her few books, her little ornaments, the glass filled with wild flowers, that he had brought home for her on the previous evening; but where was she?

Puzzled and anxious, he walked to and fro until the dawn of the morning. Then he grew really alarmed; that she should be out, and out all night, was terrible. He tried to think that she had been detained somewhere; that she would come back in the morning, with many excuses, and tell him where she had been detained. He did not try to sleep—sleep while Laure was away was impossible.

So the full morning came; noon came; she was still absent. He did not go to work; he forgot all about the book; he did not eat, or sleep, or rest; he was looking for Laure.

Lord Cardin sent for him; but he bade the messenger say he could not come. The end of that week found him foot-sore, weary, haggard and careworn; found him almost mad with his unutterable despair.

He had said no word of his loss; he would not, for it had dawned across him, slowly, surely, that she had left him, and left him of her own accord. He found that she had gone in her best dress; and common-sense told him that she would not have put on that dress without knowing why. The first time that idea came to him he laughed at it, scorned it, scouted it. Laure would never leave him. Slowly, surely, the conviction came home to him,

that she must have left him. The letter with the fifty-pound note came; he never connected it with her; he thought it had something to do with his book; and tearing it in half, he trampled it under his feet. Of what use was money to him without his darling.

Still he told no one. Men met him looking haggard and worn—looking half mad; and they wondered what there was in his wild white face that repelled sympathy. No one dared go to him and say, "What is the matter, Owen?" He told no one because he was so sure she would come back. In his gentle, loving heart he made all excuses for her. She was young and thoughtless; she wanted to see something of the world; she had grown tired of the little cottage among the trees; but—Heaven bless him and all such simple, noble men—he never thought she had done wrong. She had not left him to go with any one else; neither love nor gold would tempt her from him. But she was young; and he had done wrong to try to keep her in that little gloomy house. He would never tell any one; he would keep her secret; no man should cast a slur on her name; no man should ever say she had betrayed him. Yet his misery had driven him almost mad. Lord Cardin, who was always kind and considerate to his inferiors, went at last to look for him; he found him lying on the floor of his cottage, exhausted by his long fast and want of sleep; my lord hardly recognized, in this haggard, worn man, the bright, active Owen whom he had never seen yet without a smile on his face.

The first thing Lord Cardin did was to take his brandy-flask—which he fortunately had with him—and pour some brandy between the white lips. Then he waited until some signs of life returned.

"Owen," he said, "what has gone wrong with you? Why do I find you in this state? Where is your wife?"

"My wife!" he cried, "oh, my wife!"

The words seemed to break the strong resolve; he turned from Lord Cardin and hid his face.

"My wife!" he cried. "Oh, God, my wife!"

And Lord Cardin listened to those sobs and tears until he felt himself growing ill and faint. What could have happened, he wondered, to have brought a strong man so low.

"My lord," he said, at last, "I am ashamed of myself

—quite ashamed; but I have been so long without food and without sleep. I have had a dreadful trouble, my lord."

"Where is your wife?" repeated Lord Cardin.

"My lord, you must not think it wrong of her; she is as pure as an angel; but she—she grew tired of the cottage and the trees here; it was too dull for her—she has gone to live somewhere else."

Then the great wave of his anguish swept over him, and he fell at Lord Cardin's feet.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SUFFERINGS OF A NOBLE HEART.

He never told her secret, he kept it faithfully; if any one suspected, they did not say so to him; there was something in his face, in his manner, that checked all questions; he was prouder in his sorrow and loneliness than he had ever been in his happiness.

For many long days he lay in the little cottage, simply because he had not the strength to rise and go out to his duties. The very soul and life were crushed in him; his heart seemed dead; he could not recover from the shock. He made no complaint, but he fastened his door against the whole world, and, turning his face to the wall prayed that he might die; but death does not come to the young and strong when they wish for it or long for it; it did not come to him. The keen edge of his sorrow grew more blunt; the grand strength of his manhood seemed to return to him, and once more he rose to do battle with the world.

Lord Cardin was very kind to him; he had infinite pity and compassion for this simple, noble man whose lips were sealed by his simple, faithful love; he was kind to him during his illness; he would not have teased him with questions, he was kind to him in every way; he read the secret of that simple heart; he knew that the beautiful young wife had run away from him and would return no more—it was an old story to him. He misjudged Laure; he thought her worse than she was; he believed that she had deceived and betrayed her young husband; that she had left him to go with some one else who could give her luxury and gayety; he never dreamed of the reality—to him

it was the old story—and he respected the anguish of the young husband who would have suffered anything rather than have let his wife's story go forth to the world. He was kind to him in this way—that he stood between him and the world—he told the story in such a way there was no other question to be asked.

"Do not speak to Owen about his wife," he said. "The fact is, she found that kind of life too dull for her; she did not like the cottage, and she has gone away; he thinks she will return in a year or two—and perhaps she will; but say nothing to him about it."

So that long before Owen had returned to his place in the world, every one knew what had happened, and that it was my lord's wish that no one should speak to Owen about it.

They were tender-hearted as children to him, those strong, stalwart, wood-keepers, gamekeepers, and under-gardeners; they were delicate and refined with him, as the highest noble in the land could have been; they never spoke of their wives or children in his presence; they never spoke of the comforts of home. It was by their avoidance of all these topics, by the gentleness that stole into each rough face and voice, that Owen understood they knew and respected his sorrow. The person who really hurt him was Lady Cardin, whose beautiful Java birds had been found dead. She went to the cottage herself, and insisted on seeing Owen; she looked up with pity when the gaunt, haggard man stood before her.

"How much you must have suffered to look like that," she said.

He bowed, but he made no answer. My lady was one of those imperious women who expect an answer, and will have one. She almost dazzled Owen's eyes as she stood in the little parlor; her rich dress sweeping the floor, her tall figure erect, and her handsome face, with its bright, keen eyes, looking into his face.

"How much you have suffered, Owen," she repeated.

"My lady," he said, "we will not speak of my sufferings, they are of no account."

"It is something new for you to dictate to me, Owen, what I shall say," replied Lady Cardin. "I repeat that you must have suffered much; there is no harm, no wrong in that. Let me say that I am sorry for it."

Her face and voice both softened as she spoke. He thanked her, and my lady continued:

"I am sorry indeed for you. Where is that unhappy wife of yours, Owen?"

"I would rather not speak of my wife, my lady; wherever she is I hold her in all honor and esteem."

"That is all nonsense. If she has left you she deserves neither honor nor esteem; and it is absurd for you to speak of giving her either. Where is she?"

"You must not think I am rude, my lady; but I can not tell you," he said.

No one should draw from him this secret of his misery.

Lady Cardin continued:

"It is nonsense of you, Owen, to try to shield her. If she has really been base enough to leave you, you ought to expose her. I have no patience for the weak love that makes excuses for anything and everything."

"My lady," he said, gravely, "there is a love so weak that even you may despise it, and there is a love so strong that you can not even understand it; that is my love."

Lady Cardin's face flushed slightly.

"I did not come here to discuss the different kinds of love with you, but to ask you a question my position entitles me to ask. Where is your wife?"

"I can not answer it," he replied.

"That should be answer sufficient," she said.

"My lady," said Owen, "I believe in my wife as I believe in Heaven. She is no light-of-love. If she has gone away for a time she has good reason for it; and she will return, I have no fear of it--none—she will return."

"You will be to blame if you take her in," said Lady Cardin.

"Why?" asked Owen, briefly.

"You must be foolish not to understand why she left you," sneered my lady.

"I will understand nothing against her," he said, "not one word. I believe in her as I believe in Heaven."

"You pay no great compliment to Heaven," said my lady. "If you do not understand, you ought to. I never liked your wife; those women who think themselves so pretty are very seldom much good."

He only smiled as he thought to himself how jealous my

lady was of Laure's most beautiful face. That did not hurt him.

She continued:

"Your wife was proud and vain; it is easy enough to see that she left you because she valued that which you could not give her more than she valued your love. She has gone off with some one who can give her fine dresses."

She stopped suddenly, for the pain in his white face shocked her.

He held up his hand.

"Hush, my lady," he said, hoarsely. "You do not know what you are saying; you have no right to utter such words. I love my lord, and I have served him well; but I declare, before Heaven, if you say one word against my dear and beautiful young wife, I will go; and I would rather die of starvation than ever take one farthing in your service again."

The words touched her. She said no more, for she saw that he would keep his word. Proud as she was, she liked Owen, and so did her husband; and she knew better than to drive him to extremes. She shrugged her shoulders.

"You are very foolish," she said. "But of course you will please yourself. I am sorry for you, Owen Roden. Is there anything that I can do to help you?"

"I do not want any help, my lady," he said.

She looked round the pretty, neat little cottage.

"You can not live here alone," she said.

"I shall not be alone," he answered. "My wife will come back soon."

That proud, haughty lady left him with tears in her eyes.

"He has a grand soul," she said to herself; "a grand, simple, chivalrous soul. How could any woman leave such a man?"

After that my lady always treated him with the greatest kindness and consideration; she sent him pretty little presents of no great value, but showing her kindly feeling; she lent him books; she never missed an opportunity of being kind to him. She would not allow any one to speak evil of his wife; that simple, earnest, loving faith had touched her. As the years rolled on Owen became more like a trusted friend to Lord and Lady Cardin than anything else.

It was pitiful as a great tragedy and beautiful as the

sweetest poem how he watched and waited for her for six whole years; there was no moment, night or day, in which he did not expect her. He had put all his money away—he would not touch one farthing of it—it was for Laure when she returned. It was pitiful; and when the women of the country-side spoke of it, it was with tears in their eyes.

All through the dark winter evenings he kept a lamp burning in the window, so that, let his darling come back when she would, she would know, even before she entered the house, how warm and loving a welcome awaited her. There was something so sad, so pathetic in the light of that little lamp as it streamed on the dark ground or the white snow, that no one could pass it without a sigh for the noble, kindly heart suffering in silence and sorrow.

So through the warm, bright summer days he would have the doors open and the sunlight peeping in, so that she should feel herself welcome, and know that love as warm and true as the sun itself awaited her. It was pitiful how he started at every sound—at the breaking of a branch, the least movement of the leaves, a footstep on the dead leaves—he started and hastened to the door with a flush on his face, only to return with the faint hope dead and a new pain in his heart.

So six years passed; and during the course of them not one word against her, not one thought against her ever passed his lips. There were times when, for whole days together, he was possessed with the idea that she was returning, when he never sought sleep nor food, but walked to and fro through the woods and the high-roads, stopping at times to call her name aloud, and the sound of it frightened the singing birds from the trees; but there was no sign of her—it was as though she had vanished from the face of the earth.

He never lost his faith in her; his was the love of a martyr, of a hero, so grand in its perfect trust that it was half divine; it never grew less. It was a mystery to him, this flight of hers; but he believed that she would return some day and explain it all, just as he believed in the light of the stars, the beauty of the flowers, or the mercy of Heaven. He could not have greater faith; but his faith, as his love, was all in vain.

CHAPTER XXX.

"I AM A DEAD MAN."

THIS had continued for six long years. It was in the seventh year that Dr. Lainham, the learned gentleman who had taken such interest in Owen's career, wrote to him and asked him to come to his house in London. "Flower Life" had already passed through many editions; but only a few knew by whom it was written. Owen would not allow his name to be printed—that name Laure had borne and had made so precious to him. He had forgotten all about the book; he had never read the reviews that had praised it. He had never felt the least pleasure in it now that Laure was gone.

He would have declined Dr. Lainham's invitation, but that Lord Cardin would not allow him.

"Nonsense, Owen," he said, "you must go. I can not let you bury your talent under a bushel after this fashion. You must go. Doctor Lainham wants to compare notes with you to see if you have any more information; if so, he sees his way, no doubt, to another book. Owen," continued Lord Cardin, earnestly, "how I wish I could see you throw off this apathy. You might be one of the first men in England if you would; no one understands flowers as you do."

"I shall care about it all when Laure comes back," said Owen.

And Lord Cardin turned away with a sigh; he knew the chances were Laure would never come back. He had his own way in one respect—he compelled Owen to go to Dr. Lainham's and take with him all his written notes, assuring him that they would be found to be of great value.

Owen went. He spent two or three pleasant weeks with Dr. Lainham—weeks that cheered and brightened him with a thousand new thoughts. He saw and understood all that life held more than he had ever done before.

He saw that Heaven had been most good to him; that he had a wonderful talent; and he understood that, with this talent, he could have made a name and fame for himself; he could have acquired wealth and position, if only

Laure had been there to help him, to share it with him; without her it was quite valueless to him—quite useless.

Still he enjoyed London. It was in the month of May; and the doctor took him to Kew Gardens—to every garden of note in London—and if for one moment he could have forgotten Laure he would have been happy; but he could not forget her. It was now six years since he had seen her, yet her lovely young face was before him as vividly as ever.

One bright May day the doctor had some engagement, and Owen was left to himself. He wandered through Hyde Park, and came to the Row. It was the first time he had seen that wonderful sight—the carriages, the horses, the beautiful women filled him with wonder; his heart beat whenever a girl's golden head came in sight.

He was watching the crowd, when suddenly, among those near him there was a slight stir; murmurs of admiration and whispered comments. With others he looked to see—a magnificent carriage with two fine horses was coming along. His dazzled eyes saw a handsome man playing with a lovely, fairy-like child, seated by a lady so gorgeously beautiful that it was no wonder every one turned to look at her as she passed. She was perhaps one minute in passing where he stood—one minute; but to him it held whole hours of torture; earth and sky seemed to meet; his tortured eyes seemed dazed, for the beautiful face into which he gazed was surely the face of Laure, his lost wife, as it was sure that the sun shone in heaven.

He saw her plainly. She was leaning back in her carriage, her attitude one of careless, exquisite grace. She held a parasol which threw a delicate rose tint on her face; Ler proud, bright eyes wandered over the crowd of faces with a half amused smile; they lingered for half a moment on the man who loved her with so wonderful a love, but there was no recognition in them—nothing but a calm smile; and then she was gone.

Gone. The carriage rolled easily along; the crowd seemed to close in after it; and it was out of his sight—gone.

He had seen her again; he had looked into the face which held the very light of Heaven; and he had seen her dressed like a queen, with all the dignity of a grand duchess; he had seen her smiling in another man's face with a little

child between them. Oh, Heaven, that he had seen this sight and lived. For one moment the white tortured face looked wildly around, then the fashionable throng were somewhat astonished; he fell down among them like a dead man, and they drew away in horror.

One or two good Samaritans rushed to him and picked him up; a doctor came and said he had swooned, but would be all right soon. No one dreamed that the lovely lady with the golden hair had crushed the very heart within him.

An hour or two later he was back in Dr. Lainham's house. And that learned man was looking at him with wondering eyes.

"You have been in the park, Roden. What have you seen there to drive all the color from your face, and make you look more than half mad?"

He had seen nothing. He would not speak of Laure. He would not tell what he had seen.

"I did not know that I could die another death," he said to himself; "but that has killed me. I must go home."

He bade Dr. Lainham good-bye the next day; he left all his closely written pages with him; if they were worth printing the doctor could do what he liked with them; as for the money he did not want it.

"I can not understand you, Roden," said the doctor.

"No, you can not; you must think of me as you would of a dead man. I am to all intents and purposes a dead man."

"It is a great sin to let one's talents rest, Roden. They are given to us to make a good use of; and you know what happens to those who bury them."

"I can only repeat that I am a dead man. God knows why. He will not be angry. He knows why."

And when Owen Roden had gone, the man of science sat for some time thinking of him. He roused himself with a sigh.

"There is a woman in the case, I am sure," he said. "There is nothing that plays the mischief with a man as a woman does. Poor Owen; there is another genius lost to the world, and all through a woman. If men could be content to love flowers and plants!"

He went home, back to the little cottage he had kept sacred as a shrine for her; and there he realized his loss—

realized what had happened. The first loss, that of her bright, sweet presence, was nothing to him now; the loss of her beautiful bright face, her sweet voice, her loving, caressing ways, all that was less than this, the darkest, saddest loss of all, the loss of his faith in her, of his trust.

Who was that by her side? who had tempted her away from him? who had surrounded her with luxuries? Who was that little, lovely child, with Laure's face, and Laure's eyes? who was it?

Great Heaven! that he should live to ask that question. He looked round the place that had been sacred as a shrine to her, where he had worshiped her beauty, her purity, her goodness; where he had consecrated his life to one loving, passionate memory of her; looked round it as a torrent of burning words rose to his lips. He crushed them back; he would not utter them; he would die rather than say any word against her—die any death.

"My pretty little home," he said. "Oh, Laure, what a heart you have crushed, what a love you have trampled on!"

He could bear the place no more. Had she died it would have been the most sacred shrine to him. Even had he not seen her it would have been a shrine where he would have worshiped the memory of her purity and truth; but now—

There was a wide opening between the trees, and there Owen Roden kindled a large fire. Then slowly enough he brought out everything the house held—the little picture Laure had loved, her chair, her little work-table, the pretty toilet-table—brought everything she had ever touched or used, and threw them into the fire. Those who saw the smoke rising from between the trees thought that Owen Roden was making a huge bonfire, but no one guessed what was burning there.

Then he looked round the empty rooms, the bare walls that he was never to see again; he tore down the white roses her hands had trained, he threw away the green bush of southern-wood she had planted at the door. He bade farewell to the little house—the home where he had been so happy—then he went to the Hall. Lord Cardin met him cordially, and went to him with outstretched hand. He stopped abruptly as his eyes fell on that haggard face, and the words died on his lips.

"Lord Cardin," he said, in a broken voice, "I have come to bid you good-bye. I can not stay here—not another day."

"Where are you going, Owen?" he asked.

"I do not know, my lord. Out into the wide world. I can not tell; anywhere."

"What has happened?" asked Lord Cardin.

"I can not tell you, my lord, though you are the kindest, best friend I have in the world. I can not tell you; the heart and the manhood are crushed within me. I am a dead man."

"It has something to do with your wife, I know," said Lord Cardin; "nothing else would shake and touch you. I will not ask for your confidence, Owen, but I will ask this, can I do anything in the wide world to help you?"

"No, my lord; I am sorry to leave you, but I could not stay; I could not enter the house again; I could not bear the sight of these familiar scenes; I could not live here; so I am going away to lose myself in the great wide world of men."

There was little more to say. The two men shook hands in silence, and as Owen Roden passed out of his sight forever, Lord Cardin said to himself:

"There is another noble, clever man spoiled, ruined, driven mad by a woman's folly—driven mad, ruined body and soul, all through loving a woman. It would be well if such men could fix their hearts on other things."

CHAPTER XXXI.

A MAN WELL RECOMMENDED.

A GLIMPSE of Owen. Was it possible? Lady Ulverston asked herself over and over again. No, it was but fancy—nothing more than an idle dream. She had been driving with her husband in the park, and while the carriage was passing slowly under the shade of the trees, she had fancied she saw Owen's face. Of course it was but a foolish, idle fancy. Would Owen be in London—in that fine, fashionable crowd, watching the carriages and the beautiful women? It was nonsense to think of such a thing. She had been deceived by some shade of resemblance, by some trick of feature; she had met fully the

glance of the man so like Owen, and there had been no recognition in it. How absurd she was. But she had not seen that same man fall to the ground as though he were stricken dead. When should she forget Owen? Lord Ulverston's beautiful wife would give the half of her beauty, the half of her possessions, to be able to forget. It was the memory of the wrong she had done that poisoned her life. She had risen so completely above her other life, it would be so utterly impossible for her to do now as she had done then. Since then her mind, her soul, her conscience had been educated; she shuddered when she remembered it. When she was most fêted, most courted, she would ask herself: "What would people say to me, now, if they knew? What would they think of me if they could see me in my true colors?" She could never, let her try as she would, forget her sin.

She was very happy with Lord Ulverston. He was devotedly fond of his beautiful wife. He thought her peerless among women, and she loved him as a prince among men; his noble character, his rectitude, his pride, his contempt of wrong, his love of right had all won her admiration and love. They were happy, she was obedient and submissive to him; she yielded to his superiority without a murmur. People greeted her as a model wife; they talked of her amiability and her sweetness; they were quite unconscious of the fact that a terrible background was to be found in this life which seemed so simple and so innocent, so sweet and good.

The Marquis de Bourdon was very proud of his beautiful niece; he had always felt quite sure of her success in society, but it exceeded his wildest dreams; it was more than he had hoped for. He spent a great deal of time with them; he was a frequent visitor at Ulvers. When Lord and Lady Ulverston went to town he always went. He was warmly attached to them both. When Lady Laure's little daughter was born, his happiness knew no bounds. It was one of the prettiest sights in the world to see the two gentlemen, both so stately, tall and aristocratic, in raptures of delight over the tiny rose-bud of a baby, and they called her Lily, because she was so fair. She was like Lady Laure; she had dark, soft eyes, full of wonderful meaning, full of solemn wonder, with soft, golden rings of curls.

Lady Laure worshiped her. The strongest impulse of her heart was maternal love, and she idolized this lovely, tiny girl. She could never bear to be separated from her. Even when she went to town, Lily must go with her; when she drove out in the park she could not go without the child. She had loved little John after the same worshiping fashion, but it was so seldom that she ever found the opportunity of seeing him so that she could talk to him at her ease. The love repressed there was all lavished on the little Lily.

John Owen had grown into a fine, handsome boy. He was six years old now, and considered himself a man; he was dauntless in spirit—a boy that any mother could have worshiped—noble, fiery, brave, truthful. In one thing he was above his age, that was his passionate love for the beautiful Lady Ulverston. She had not always been quite so careful as she should have been. When he was quite a little child she had caressed him and talked to him, in what Pattie said was a very imprudent fashion.

"He will remember it, my lady," she said, "and he will expect you always to do the same thing."

"He will forget it, Pattie," Lady Ulverston had answered.

But the maid was right, the mistress wrong. He did not forget it, and he expected her to do the same.

How she loved him! When they came to Ulvers, Pattie, by Lord Ulverston's consent, brought the boy with her, and he remained for a week or two at the Hall; then a home was found for him at Knareston, the little town which belonged almost entirely to the lord of Ulvers. He lived there with a Mrs. Chiltern, who had several children of his own. Her husband was head gamekeeper on the estate, and the little boy was happy enough there. They called him John Owen Clark; and Pattie would weave many a story for him of an ideal dead father, who had been the very soul of honor, of a fair young mother smiling down from the blue skies.

Once, as she was sitting with the boy in a nook, lovely enough to be a fairy dell, both making cowslip balls, Pattie told him one of these stories, and my lady overheard it. Her beautiful face flushed.

"Pattie," she said, vehemently, "I wish you would not teach him that his father is dead."

"It will be for the best, my lady."

"It will not—I can not bear to hear it. You forget me."

"Nay, my lady, I never forget you," said Pattie, gently. "It is for your own sake I speak. You have the future to think of, more than the present. Let the child grow up in the belief that I would give him. It makes your secret all the safer."

But Lady Ulverston did at times forget what was prudent. She caught the child in her arms now and kissed him.

"Say, 'my mother,' John," she said.

And the boy raising his eyes to the blue sky, said:

"There—my mother is there."

She covered him with passionate tears and kisses.

Now, at Ulverston, she very seldom went near the house where the child lived. Mrs. Chiltern hardly knew that my lady knew of his existence; she never made any inquiries over it. Only Pattie knew that more than once Lord Ulverston had admired the noble little fellow. There was a scene once that delighted Lady Ulverston, though it brought the tears to her eyes. She was walking in the park with the little Lily, and in the distance she saw Pattie just taking the boy home. She called him to her. In his frank, fearless fashion he went, holding out his little hand. He bowed to her with the courtesy of a little lord. He had been well brought up, this little child, who belonged to no one. Then he looked at the lovely, fairy girl.

"How pretty she is," he cried; "oh, how pretty," and without another word, without waiting for permission or invitation, he threw his arms round her neck and kissed her.

Instead of crying, the little Lily looked at him with delight. Pattie called him away in horrified haste, but Lady Ulverston bending over him, said:

"Do you like that little girl, John?"

"Yes, I like her," he answered.

"Then kiss her again," said my lady.

The two lovely little faces touched each other.

"My lady, you must not," said Pattie; "you must not indeed. You will be sorry for it afterward. You are doing wrong."

"It is only for once, Pattie," said my lady, "only for once. They look so nice together."

She stood for a few minutes looking at them, and perhaps there was no time in her life when her sin smote her with more terrible anguish.

These were both her children — the one abandoned, neglected, deprived of the love of his mother, of the care of his father, deprived of home, of everything, because to further her own advancement in life she had given him up. There was the other, beloved, honored, petted, worshiped, sheltered in home by the love of father and mother. Oh, how unequal were such lots—how unjust. Of these two, her own children, she had to send one away, with cold words, the other she might gather to her heart with caresses.

It came home to her there, how cruelly she had wronged that boy, how she had defrauded him of his most sacred rights, even though in some measure she could better provide for him. No one could ever have seen that mother and son together without knowing or guessing there was some tie between them. The child had grown up so much like Owen that he was Owen in miniature, yet there was something of my lady in his face when he was near her. Lady Ulverston seemed as though she could not help herself, as though her fingers must touch the bonny curls, as though she must kiss the bonny face, as though she must take him in her arms and never let him go. It required all Pattie's time and attention to keep my lady from some terrible imprudence which would perhaps compromise her.

So time had passed and the spring of the year had come. Lord and Lady Ulverston began to think of returning to Ulvers. Lord Ulverston said the gardens would be all in their greatest beauty. His wife turned away at the mention of the word. He laughed aloud.

"You never care to hear about the gardens, Laure," he said; "it is a strange thing for a beautiful woman not to love flowers; you are the first I have known."

"I do not love them," she said, and in good truth she did not. The very sight and fragrance of them always brought Owen back so forcibly to her mind. She never willingly lingered near them; it was noticed that she very seldom carried a bouquet; she always wore jewels in prefer-

ence to flowers. No one ever saw her stand near the beautiful jardinières; she never by preference walked in the flower garden. No one who wished to please her ever brought her flowers. It was strange, as Lord Ulverston said, but no one knew what painful, pitiful memories flowers had for her.

"I wish sometimes, Laure," he said, "that you did take more interest in the gardens. I am so very fond of them—I mean to have them enlarged. I am looking out for a clever man who can take the entire superintendence of them."

She did not feel much interest in the matter, but listened to him with all amiable interest.

"It is not really an easy thing to find a man who thoroughly understands flowers and the art of gardening; he must be poet and artist in a small way. Sir Arthur Mason has written to me about a man who has been for some months with him, a man whom he calls a genius. I think I shall engage him."

"Is he a genius?" she asked, listlessly.

"Sir Arthur says so. Let me see, here is his note: 'A strange man, very silent and reserved, but clever and wonderful in his arrangement and combination of color. His name is Mitchel; his age over thirty.' I think I shall engage him."

"It would be as well, if he be really clever," she answered, but the matter did not engage her attention for five minutes; it had no interest for her.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A CAREWORN MAN.

Lord Ulverston stood alone in his beautiful gardens; he was looking around them with pride and delight. Yet, beautiful as they were, he could see where improvement would make them even more beautiful; he could see where a fountain could throw its silvery spray into the air, where white statues could gleam from between the green trees; he could see where a man with true artistic taste could make something like an earthly paradise of his grounds, and he sighed for the coming of the new gardener who was to work such marvels there.

As he stood looking around him, with happy eyes and a glad happy heart, one of the servants came to say that Mr. Mitchel had arrived.

Lord Ulverston looked well pleased.

"He has come, has he? Send him here to me. I am much pleased."

A few minutes later, and Mitchel stood before his new master, and Lord Ulverston was delighted, puzzled, and interested in his appearance. He saw before him a tall, strong, handsome man, with grand strong limbs, a broad chest, bonny shoulders and a frank, honest face; he had clusters of brown curls that covered a noble head.

"An ideal gardener," thought Lord Ulverston to himself.

Yet, though he was handsome and strong, he did not look like a gentleman. He was simply a fine specimen of the old English yeoman. But it was his face that attratced Lord Ulverston's attention—a good, honest, earnest face, so cruelly marked with pain, he looked as though he had suffered more terribly than words could tell. There were great lines on his brow, and lines round his mouth, that told of long-repressed anguish and bitter pain. He was quite young, but among the clustering curls one could see the gray hairs; his face had a worn, weary expression that made Lord Ulverston wonder much. He had a pleasant voice, a slow, gentle, pleasant smile; but, no matter what he was saying or doing, he had the look of one whose thoughts were fixed on some inward wound that never healed.

Lord Ulverston greeted him kindly. He liked him at once, and when they had talked for a short time he was delighted with Mitchel's quaint knowledge, his thorough acquaintance with trees and flowers, his love for them, his keen artistic eye. He turned to him, with a smile.

"I have often quoted the old Latin saying, that a poet must be born, and not made," he said; "now I believe the same thing of a gardener; one must be born with a true taste for these things."

Mitchel, as he stood by his lordship's side, sketched in few words for him a plan by which the grounds could be greatly improved, and again Lord Ulverston was struck with his aptitude and genius. He had not engaged him as head gardener; the one who now filled that post had held

it for years, and Lord Ulverston never hurt the mind or wounded the feelings of any of his old servants. He would not say to this one that he found him incapable; he was old and probably had not long to live; but he engaged Mitchel to superintend the alterations. There was something noble and dignified now about his lordship as he stood speaking of his faithful old servant, Martin Olive.

"I am sure, Mitchel," he said, "you will understand that in every way I want to spare the old man's feelings. You will ask his advice, just to please him; you need never follow it. Consult him every now and then. I like old Martin."

Mitchel looked up at him with softened eyes. From that hour master and man were excellent friends.

Mitchel said something about the great natural beauty of the ground, and the great profusion of flowers. Lord Ulverston never knew why he began to talk about his wife, but he did so.

"Lady Ulverston takes no interest in the garden," he said; "she does not like flowers."

Mitchel looked up with some surprise.

"Not like flowers, my lord," he said; "how strange. I have never heard before of any lady who did not like flowers," and his mind reverted in one moment to that beautiful wife of his who loved them and cared for them as though they were living creatures.

"It is strange," said Lord Ulverston; "but that accounts in some measure for the little interest that has been taken in the garden. Lady Ulverston prefers the park and the woods. I am often surprised at it."

They said no more on the subject, but Mitchel thought more than once of the lady who did not like flowers.

That evening, when Lord Ulverston was talking over the events of the day, he told his wife that Mitchel, whom he had engaged to superintend the alterations, had arrived, and how pleased he was with him. My lady was playing negligently with a pearl fan, and hardly heard his words.

"He seems very clever," said Lord Ulverston, "and has such a quaint beautiful way of speaking about flowers; he seems to think they are of quite as much consequence as people."

She made no answer. The subject did not interest her in the least, and Lord Ulverston, seeing that it was so, said

no more. She never dreamed in her indifference that the man she had loved and married, whose lawful wife she was, lived near her now, and was the paid servant of her husband; she never dreamed that fate had brought Owen even to her very doors; that the time was drawing near when the horror of her crime must come home to her, and the price be paid.

Owen Roden had struggled hard with himself, when he left Lord Cardin's, to lose himself, as he said, in the wide world. He never intended to work or to interest himself in anything again; he did not care to live—he wished that he might die by the roadside, unknown, uncared for. Why should he live any longer when life had no charm, no pleasure, no hope? But death seldom comes to those who seek it. It did not come near Owen. He sought for no work, he wandered listlessly from place to place; he never entered a green church-yard that he did not pray Heaven he might remain there.

When he found a quiet village home he rested there, until the fever of his own thoughts drove him away. As the years passed on his grief grew no less, his sorrow did not abate; the memory of that time when he saw Laure in all the splendor of her beauty, with the child whom he knew to be hers by her side, that memory never left it. The picture was burned into his brow, stamped upon his heart; he saw it everywhere; and so it was that the fever of his love never died, and the sting of his sorrow never left him. Yet it was wonderful how, throughout all his wanderings, every one loved him, how the little children crowded round him, and the women treated him as a friend. The dogs came and licked his hands; everything created seemed to understand his gentle, earnest, loving, honest nature. What thoughts went with him through these wanderings. In the pleasant, fragrant summer evenings he would stand at some cottage door, watching a fair-haired young mother at play with her children, watching them with such wistful pathos, such sad, loving eyes, that very often a child would break from the caressing clasp of his mother's arms and run to him.

There would be no child's love for him. Ah, dear Heaven, if Laure had but stayed with him, if she had but been true to him, as these wives whom he saw in the village homes were to their husbands, it might have been that

he would have a child of his own like these happy, brown-limbed, careless children, for whom their mother's love made heaven. Ah, no! there was no such joy for him, no such happiness, and he would wonder as he stood, why so much happiness was given to some and so little to others.

So he spent two or three years of his life. Never a carriage drove past him that he did not raise his eyes to see if it held the beautiful, false woman whom he called his wife.

He had no idea of where she was, whether her home was in England or abroad; whether she lived in the town or the country he could form no idea; but he reproached himself for one thing. He ought when he saw her to have asked whose carriage that was. Then he would have known by what name she was called in this new, false life of hers. He blamed himself that he had not turned quickly to one of the bystanders, and asked who that lady was. That by-stander would have known.

Yet what would it have benefited him? She had gone out of his life. Even if he knew where she was, and what she was doing, it would not benefit him, not in the least; it could not bring her back to him young, loving, and true. Why should he desire to see her? But he thought of her until at times he almost went mad—until he could not bear his life or anything in it, and he tried to walk off his trouble—he wandered about, he wasted his life, but he did not die.

Then by slow degrees the strength of his manhood re-asserted itself; he began to tire of inaction; the natural force of his character and the nobility of his soul came to the front again; he must work and must live. He had done the wisest thing he could do in leaving his home and his old life behind him. There were times when he said to himself that Owen Roden was dead—slain by the beautiful young wife he loved so dearly. This silent, haggard, care-worn man, wandering wherever will and fancy led him, this was not Owen Roden, not the happy-hearted man who had dreamed bright dreams, and married the loveliest girl in the land. He must work; death would not come to him; he had sought it, and inaction wearied him. He determined to face life once more, and make the best of it.

He loved his art even in the midst of his despair; he seldom passed a garden without stopping to look at the

arrangement of the flowers; in the hours of his deepest distress the color of a wild rose, the flush on a leaf, would attract him. He said to himself that he would take to it again. Sir Arthur Mason was advertising for a head gardener, and Owen wrote to Lord Cardin asking him if he would send him testimonials, but not in the name he had borne, not as Owen Roden; he called himself Mitchel, and Lord Cardin was only too pleased. From Sir Arthur Mason's he went at once to Lord Ulverston's without the least notion of where he was going.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FATHER AND SON.

Mr. Mitchel took his place among the employés of Lord Ulverston; he was looked upon with great respect. Lord Ulverston spoke highly of his talents, and said how he wished him to be obeyed and respected. The mere expression of his wish was law to every one on his estate, and Owen found himself treated with the greatest consideration. He himself had rooms in the cottage belonging to the woman who took charge of the lodge gates. It was just on the outside of the park, quiet and beautiful; he enjoyed the fresh air and the sweet-smelling flowers, he was pleased to be at work again, and put the whole force and strength of his heart and soul into his work. People became accustomed to him: every one liked him, he was silent and grave, yet there was something so gentle and sweet in his manner that all loved him. It seemed so strange that he, this tall strong man, had the art and charm even to tame the wild birds; the brown hares leaped, regardless of him, in the woods; they did not seem to take fright at the sight of the man's white face; the squirrels jumped from the trees, and did not scream with fright at him.

The people about the park soon became accustomed to the tall, strong figure and the sad, half stern, half sweet face. He did not make many friends. The men soon became accustomed to his silent, grave manner; they respected him, but there was not one among them who did not understand that he had a secret in his life—a secret that had made him old in his youth.

They noticed that he never went where he would be likely

to meet any of the fair sex—he never seemed to take the least notice of them; no one ever saw him stop to speak to any of the rosy-faced dairy-maids, or to any the pretty maids at the Hall; they came and went, they passed and repassed him with shy coy looks; he never even saw them; they sent him pretty messages; he never seemed to hear them; but he worked, no man ever worked so hard; he seemed to have no other pleasure; from the early morn until late at night he worked without cessation. Lord Ulverston soon became more than pleased—Owen had such grand taste, the combination of colors, the arrangement of plants—no one could equal him. He spoke everywhere of his clever gardener.

And in the meantime the solitary man made one friend, one man seemed to have an attraction for him; it was Chiltern, the head gamekeeper, a stalwart, honest man, who was struck with admiration at Owen's talent. The two were friends; they did not talk very much together, but each felt that the other was reliable, might be trusted to the very death. Chiltern had often invited Owen to his home.

"I have a dear little wife and a pretty little house," he would say: "come and see me, Mr. Mitchel, you must be very lonely; come on Sunday and take dinner with us; come when you will. My wife is the kindest of women, she will make you so welcome—she will be so pleased to see you."

He wondered why this chosen friend of his leisure hours turned from him with a sigh on his pale lips. His thoughts had flown in one moment to that little home of his where his beautiful young wife had reigned like a queen. Chiltern might well wonder at the groan that came from his lips.

"I can not visit you," he said abruptly: "I think the sight of a home would destroy me," and for some weeks no more was said about it; but the time came when Chiltern, through an injury to his arm, was quite unable to leave the house, and from sheer good nature Mr. Mitchel went to see him.

The keeper's house was a pretty, comfortable place, the wife a bonny, fair-haired woman, with one of those warm, kind, motherly hearts, that reflect brightness on all; around them were several pretty fair-haired children.

At first Owen passed them by and took no notice of them; then one by one, the little ones crept up to his side, one by one the little fair-haired heads clustered round him, and the little voices prattled to him of treasures in the woods and the fields.

There was a quiver of pain on his face as he listened; then that passed, and he had learned to look at a child, to listen to a woman's voice, to endure the love, and peace, and happiness of home, when another incident occurred.

It was one evening in August, and Owen had taken a basket of fruits to the sick man, who was rapidly regaining health and strength. Chiltern was sitting up outside the cottage door, under the shade of the great alder trees, his wife sitting near him, busy with her work, the children playing round her. A beautiful home picture that never faded from his eyes. One by one he took the children in his arms, kissed them gravely, and set them down again. There was Tom, the curly-headed rogue, who was at once the greatest torment and the greatest pleasure; Mollis, a pretty blue-eyed child, and Madge, a grand little brunette; but now from between the trees another child came, and from the moment his eyes rested upon him until the moment he died, Owen Roden was never again the same man.

This was a handsome boy, about seven years old, dressed in black velvet—a boy who looked as though he had just stepped out of some picture-frame. He had a beautiful face, dark eyes, and a strong, gallant figure—a boy to win any one's heart from the first glance at his bonny face. He came from the great group of trees, crying out for his friend and playfellow, Tom.

Owen could not tell why, he did not understand his own sensations, he could not analyze his own feelings; the first look at the child's face seemed to strike through his whole being.

"Ah," said Chiltern; "here is John. You have never seen him, Mr. Mitchel."

The strong figure trembled, a quiver of pain passed over the pale face; yet why? How foolish. Why did the child's face strike him with terror that was half joy, pleasure that was half pain—why was it?

The child came up to him with outstretched hands.

"How do you do?" he said. "I have seen you very often, but you have not spoken to me."

Dear Heaven what was there in this child's sweet, shrill voice that made him fall back white and trembling, that stirred his heart with a music long still, that sent the blood like molten fire through his veins, that brought a cry to his lips, that gave him a shock like that of an earthquake, what was it? A child's shrill, sweet voice, with a tone in it that was familiar to him. Yet what folly.

"Am I going mad?" he thought to himself. She haunts me sleeping or waking. I see her face in the morning heavens, in the evening skies, in every flower, in every moment; but if her eyes are to look at me out of a child's face, if her voice is to speak to me from a child's lips, then I am mad."

Then Owen clasped the little hand in his. What could it mean, that strange trembling which seized him? It was but the touch of a child's hand. The dark, laughing eyes looked fearless in his face.

"I saw you feeding a squirrel in the Home Wood yesterday," he said, "but you did not see me."

"No," said Owen, hoarsely, "I did not see you; that is true."

Something of the sadness in his face and his voice seemed to attract the child; he looked at him more attentively.

"People say you have had a great trouble," he said, "is it true?"

"Hush, John; run away and play," said Chiltern.

Then, turning to Owen, with an air of apology, the keeper added:

"You must not notice him, Mr. Mitchel; he means no harm. All the children about here have talked nonsense about you. Run away, John."

"No," said Owen. "Let him stay with me; he must not go away."

He asked the child some simple questions and Johnnie answered them proudly, his bright, fearless eyes fixed on Owen's face.

"I think," said poor Owen, slowly, "that I have seen a boy just like you in my dreams."

"Dreams," cried the child. "I have dreams, I like dreams."

"I hope, my little boy, you will never have dreams like mine," said Owen, gently. "Yes, I have seen you in my dreams, I have seen your eyes, and they have looked at me

just as they do now, under your bonny curls. I know you now, yet I can not tell how."

"It is strange," said the keeper, "how the likeness in a face strikes us. I see one sometimes, and it makes me wonder."

Owen was looking thoughtfully over the tall trees; he turned to his friend.

"Did you hear what that child said?" he asked. "Is it true that people talk of me in that fashion?"

Chiltern looked round uneasily; like many other very good men, he was quite devoid of all presence of mind. When a difficult question was asked, he generally looked round to his wife, and so mutely appealed to her; he did so now, and the kindly woman laid her knitting needles on the table, and looked Owen fully and frankly in the face.

"Man was not made to live alone, Mr. Mitchel," she said, "and you are too lonely. People say no harm of you, but it does startle one to meet you, at all hours of the evening, walking alone, with your eyes glancing about you, and as though every moment you expect to see the shadow of some ghost or other."

Owen smiled; the kindly face pleased him.

"If they say no worse of me, Mrs. Chiltern, I am content; that will not hurt me," he said.

"Why not cheer up and make yourself more sociable, Mr. Mitchel? There are many pretty girls here—"

But she started back in affright when Owen raised his hands hastily.

"Hush," he cried. "I am grateful to you for your interest in me, but never speak to me of such things."

"I mean no harm," she said. "At least you might come to see us sometimes."

"That I will do," he answered her. "How is it, Mrs. Chiltern, I never saw that little boy of yours, Johnnie, before?"

"He is not my little boy: I take care of him; he lives with us, but is no relation; he is a nice child. And now, Mr. Mitchel, I must say good-night, it is time my husband came in-doors. Good-night, and thank you for your kindness. Come and see us as often as you can."

And Owen went slowly away.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN ACHING HEART WARMED WITH LOVE.

"I AM going mad," said Owen to himself, as he walked home that night. "There is no help for it; my troubles have driven me mad. Why should Laure's eyes look at me out of that child's face? Why should her voice sound out of those lips? I am going mad. My lord will have to finish his beautiful gardens as he will; there is no more work for me."

He threw his arms up in the air; he raised his cap from his head; he cried in the most frantic excitement; then stood quite still. It was a strange kind of madness. He laid his fingers on his wrist; he felt the beating at his temples; there was no physical sign of madness. He tried to test his memory, his mental powers—they were all right; there seemed to be no madness in his brain.

"I must see that child again," he said to himself. "I must examine his face, look into the eyes that frighten me so; see what it is that haunts me; see if I am going mad, or if I am sane."

He could not sleep that night; he kept saying to himself that he had seen Laure's eyes; asking himself if Heaven had ever made two pairs of eyes so exactly alike before.

He would take the child somewhere quite alone, talk to him, look at him, study him.

All night he paced restlessly to and fro, all day he was divided between an intense desire to go and look for the boy and an intense longing to do his duty.

Evening came. He had watched the hours, thinking they would never pass. Now the men left off work, the sun was near setting; he could go with a clear conscience, his day's work was done.

Mrs. Chiltern looked up with some little surprise when she saw him there again so soon; her face beamed with kindness. She thought he had taken her advice and was going to live on more sociable terms with his neighbors.

"Mrs. Chiltern," he said, "where is Johnnie? May I take him for a ramble through the woods? I will take good care of him."

"That indeed you may, Mr. Mitchel; and I will not say but that I am glad. He will be safe and out of mischief; he has the spirit of twenty boys all rolled into one."

To herself the kindly woman said that, even if he only grew interested in a child, it would be better than nothing. So Johnnie was called, and after a vigorous struggle his face was washed.

"As for his curls, Mr. Mitchel," said the much tired woman, "it is impossible, sir, quite—he never will stand still while they are brushed out—never. And—oh, dear, his hands."

"Never mind," said Owen, "he looks nice enough for anything."

He was impatient to be alone with the child—he could hardly control himself. At last he held the little hand in his own, and they went away together.

"Where will you like to go best, Johnnie?" he asked.

"To the woods," cried the child. "I like the trees and the squirrels; take me to the woods, Mr. Mitchel."

So to the woods they went, and under the shelter of a great copper-beech tree, Owen sat down and took the child in his arms.

"I want to look in your face, Johnnie," he said, gently; "turn it to me."

The child obeyed him. He raised his head and looked quietly at Owen.

"I am not frightened at you," he said; "Tom is. Tom says you never like anybody—I think you do."

Owen made no answer, he was looking earnestly in the little face with a strange pain in his heart, a strange sensation that he could neither account for nor describe. It seemed to him that it was his own face, yet at the same time it was Laure's—Laure's eyes, with their proud, clear brightness; Laure's brow, yet the face, the curls, the mouth were his own. Why, in the name of Heaven, should that child be like Laure and himself? It was so wonderful, yet but a freak of Dame Nature, who enjoyed freaks. He felt that he should never tire of looking at the child; it was as though some strange, mysterious force was pulling ever at his heart-strings—he loved the child; why, he knew not.

"Kiss me, Johnnie," he said, and the boy rested his soft, warm lips on his father's.

Ah! if they knew—if Owen could but have dreamed of it, could but have guessed it. But there was no voice to bid him gather the child to his heart, that he was his own. He struggled with the sure instinct of his nature without in the least knowing why. That kiss seemed the climax—he held the little one to his breast as though he would never let him go.

"Talk to me, Johnnie," he said; "tell me what you do all day long."

And Johnnie entered into a very minute and eloquent detail of daily lessons, warfares, and pastimes, till the sweet, shrill, clear voice sent Owen almost mad again, it was so terribly familiar. In his own mind he compared it, as he had done another voice as sweet and clear, to the lilt of a bird.

"Now tell me, Johnnie," he said, "about your home—your own home where you lived with your father and mother."

"This is my home," said the boy, "I live with Mrs. Chiltern."

"But," said Owen, "she is not your mother, not really."

"Pattie is my mother—no, she is not, my mother lives there," he answered, pointing with his hand to the blue skies; "up there. Pattie told me so."

Infinite pity touched Owen's gentle heart. Was it possible that this child, who by some strange freak of nature had Laure's eyes, should be motherless; he loved him the better for it, he clasped him more tightly in his arms.

"Then you have no mother, Johnnie?" he said, gently.

"Oh, yes," said the boy, "I have a mother, but she lives there."

"Do you remember her?" he asked.

"No, I do not remember her. I never saw her," he answered.

"And your father, Johnnie; do you remember him?"

"My father?" said the boy. "No, I do not know, I can not tell. My father—no one talks to me about him, he does not live in the skies—Pattie never said so."

If they had but known—if the father could but have known that he held his own son in his arms—if the child could but have understood that the father he thought of and wondered about was there."

"Poor little child," said Owen, "are you alone in the world?"

"Oh, no, not alone," he answered.

"Have you any brothers, sisters, aunts, or uncles?" asked Owen.

"No, none of those, but I have Pattie."

"Who is Pattie?" asked Owen.

The child looked perplexed.

"She is Pattie. I do not know who she is."

"Whom do you love best?" he asked again.

"I love Lady Ulverston best," was the prompt reply. "She is beautiful like an angel, she gives me money, and toys, and sweets; she kisses me. I love her best in the wide world."

"Lady Ulverston?" said Owen, slowly.

He had never seen my lord's wife; he only thought of her as of a person who did not love flowers.

"You are almost as lonely as I am, Johnnie."

"Are you lonely?" said the boy. "When I am a man I will not be lonely."

"I did not expect to be."

His hands lingered on the golden brown curls, his eyes on the handsome face.

"Child," he said, "I wonder if God has sent you to me to comfort me? All these long years it has seemed to me that my heart was seared with hot iron, and now you have brought such sweet relief to me. For years my heart has been hard, cold and proud--bitter, frozen. You have brought warmth and fragrance back to it. Child, will you love me?"

And the eyes so hungry for love looked into his; the strong frame of the man trembled again with eagerness.

The boy looked wonderingly at him.

"Do you want me to love you?" he asked. "I am not afraid of you—yes, I will love you."

But he was almost frightened when Owen clasped him in his arms again.

Then he took the boy through the wood; he gathered flowers for him, caught a nimble squirrel, showed him the wonders of that lovely green world; but all the time he was haunted by the child's face. What could it mean—this face like Laure's, yet like his? The likeness grew upon him.

"I must know more about the boy," he said to himself. "If he is really alone in the world, I will adopt him."

When Johnnie was tired, Owen took him home. He asked Mrs. Chiltern to leave her work for a time and talk to him.

"I am deeply interested in that boy," said Owen; "I want you to tell me about him. You say that he is not your own."

"There is nothing like a child for softening one's heart," said kind Mrs. Chiltern. "No, he is not my own, Mr. Mitchel, although I love him just as much as though he were—"

"Would you mind telling me about him? Has he any friends living?" he asked.

"He has an aunt; it was his aunt who brought him here. She pays for him, and finds him in everything."

"An aunt," re-echoed Owen. He could not tell why, but he felt slightly disappointed; he did not know what he had hoped to hear; he hardly knew what vague, foolish fancy filled his mind; what strange ideas hovered round him. "Then you know nothing of his parents, Mrs. Chiltern," he added.

"No, only that Mrs. Clark told me they were both dead. I am not quite sure, but I believe she said the child was born in France; when he first came here he used to speak, in his baby fashion, a few words of French. He has forgotten them now."

Owen looked wistfully at her.

"Then there is really no secret about the child?" he said.

Mrs. Chiltern seemed amazed.

"Secret!" she answered; "no, Mr. Mitchel, there is no secret about him at all that I know of."

"Who brought him to you?" he asked.

"I thought you knew, sir; I thought every one about here knew. The little boy was brought to me by Mrs. Clark—Pattie he calls her—Lady Ulverston's maid; he is her nephew, and she has adopted him. My lord often speaks to him."

"Lady Ulverston is very kind to him, is she not?" asked Owen.

"I have never seen my lady speak to him that I remember."

Owen did not repeat the child's words. If Lady Ulverston did not want her kindness to be known, he would not speak of it."

So he bade Mrs. Chiltern good evening, and went away still haunted by the boy's face, but beginning now to believe that he had been indulging in some strange fancy.

He grew to love the child; he loved him with wonderful intensity and devotion; he was never happy away from him, and with his love grew an intense desire to adopt the boy, and make him his own.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"GOD HELP ME! I FAILED."

A NEW life opened out to the solitary man. He had always loved children so much. Now, if he could adopt this child, he would have something to live for. He had loved all children; but now that he had found one like Laure, with the same wonderful, lustrous eyes, it was marvelous. To lose sight of that child would be, in a fashion, to lose sight of Laure over again—he could never part with him.

If he might but adopt him, take him to his home, lavish all the wealth of his love on him, why, life would be all different; he would have something to work for then; he should take an interest in his work, in earning money and winning fame. He loved the boy so dearly, the sound of his childish prattle was the sweetest music to him, the touch of his little hands could lead him anywhere. It was beautiful and pitiful to see the passionate love of the strong man for the little child—all his thoughts were engrossed in him.

And then the idea came to him that he would try to see this Mrs. Clark, and from her know all about the child; nothing but his love for the boy would have given him courage to address so formidable a person as a lady's-maid. He had never seen Lady Ulverston; on all sides he had heard stories of her goodness and queenly generosity—of her pride, her beauty, her fashion; but he had never once felt the curiosity to see one of whom every one was speaking; it was quite sufficient for him that she did not like flowers. To his simple mind the maid was as formidable as the mistress; still for love of the boy, he would venture

to approach her; and Chiltern, the keeper, who was able to go to work again, wondered when Owen asked him which was Mrs. Clark.

He reflected a few minutes before he answered, with a profound wish that his wife was here to answer for him; then he said slowly he was not quite sure whether he could describe her.

"She is not really Mrs. Clark; she is only called Mrs. Clark by courtesy," he replied; "she is young and unmarried."

"Unmarried!" repeated Owen, in dismay.

This made matters more difficult.

He found on cross-examining the gamekeeper, that Pattie was a blooming young woman, a brunette with bright eyes, dark hair, and a pretty face. She had also the peculiarity of always dressing in black.

"You can not fail to see her," he added; "for she comes every Monday and every Friday to see the child; you can always see her at our house."

Owen did not want to meet her before strangers; so he formed a little plan to himself that he would see her as she went to the cottage; that would be the most sensible.

It was something new for Owen to gather a bouquet of flowers to give to any one; he said to himself it was for the boy's sake; he would do anything for him—anything. He arranged the most beautiful and charming bouquet, a combination of colors that would have charmed an artist, and as Pattie crossed the wide glade of the woods, he stood there and presented it to her with a bow. Pattie looked up, astonished.

"Thank you," she said, simply; "how very beautiful!"

Pattie, like every one else, knew Mr. Mitchel by sight. She had never spoken to him before, but was flattered by the superb bouquet, and believed that it was an act of homage to her charms, so she entered into a very bright little conversation with him, and he walked some little distance with her.

He did not mention the child that evening, he thought it would not be good policy to break the ice at once. He bade her good-evening, and on Friday met her again.

This time, Pattie, much flattered, met him with a blush and a smile. She admired the handsome, melancholy man, who had never spoken to any other woman in the

place but herself. Then he spoke of the subject near his heart—the child. He told her he had seen the boy, and how much he loved him. Pattie's face beamed at the mention of his name.

"He is a grand boy," she said, "and he will make a grand man, if he lives."

"He has neither father nor mother living, I hear," said Owen.

"No," was Pattie's quiet answer; "that is quite true."

"Have they been dead long?" Owen asked.

"He never saw them; he has no recollection of them. His father died before he was born, his mother soon after." Then they were silent, and walked on for some time without saying another word. Owen spoke first.

"You must not think me intrusive," he said; "but I am very fond of the child, and have views of my own respecting him which I can not explain just now. Would you mind telling me his history?"

Pattie looked at him with wide-open eyes. It was strange that he should be so persistent over the child; still, if he loved him very much, that was easily understood.

"He has not much history," she replied; "it is very simple."

Then she paused and hesitated half a minute. She was naturally truthful, and did not like to tell the untruth she was compelled to tell about the child.

"No matter how simple the history may be," he said, "it will interest me."

"There is really no history. The father of little Johnnie was a Frenchman, who married my sister and died before the child was born. My sister died soon after. I went to France to bring the little one home, and adopted him as my own."

"You did a kind and wise thing," said Owen.

"I am more than repaid by the child himself," she continued. "I will tell you all about it; it was before my lady's marriage, and I naturally supposed that having the care of a little child I should have to leave my place, but my lady's uncle was very kind; he said that she liked me and would be sorry to lose me, so he gave me permission to bring the child home, and find a nurse for him on the estate. I did so, and then when my lady was married, she gave me permission to do the same thing. I brought

the boy here, and he has remained with Mrs. Chiltern ever since."

Owen looked wistfully at her. After all, then, the child belonged to this maiden, the child for whom he longed so intensely.

"The boy's future, then, rests with you?" he said.

"Yes," she replied, after a pause. "It rests with me. Of course you understand that my mistress, Lady Ulverston, has been kind to the child, and has undertaken to provide for its education, so that I should have to consult her; I should not like to promise anything without that."

"Certainly not; nor do I wish you to do so. What reason can I have for objecting?"

"I did not suppose that you had any reason, but I thought it better to tell you that the child does not depend on me alone."

"I am much pleased to hear anything that you may tell me, Mrs. Pattie. Now, let me give you my ideas about the boy. You will laugh, perhaps, when I tell you that I might have been a rich man if I had any one to care for me, if I had any one to love or take an interest in. I could not work or seek either riches or power for myself."

Pattie looked up at him with a pretty, coquettish smile.

"That is an evil soon remedied," she said. "I do not think any one need be alone or unloved, if he wishes to be otherwise."

And if Owen had taken the trouble to look at the handsome face blooming so near him, he would have understood better than he did.

"Did you every try," continued Pattie, "to make any one care for you?"

A vision of the beautiful face he had loved and lost came before him; he raised his sad, thoughtful eyes to hers, but he did not see her.

"Yes, I tried once and failed," he said. "God help me! I failed."

"That is no reason why you should not try again," said Pattie, with a fresh dash of coquetry.

He did not even understand her; his thoughts were back in that woodland home; and Pattie, sagely enough saying to herself that this was not the time for flirtation, continued:

"But what about the boy, Mr. Mitchel? You have not explained your views to me."

"No," he said; "we wander from the subject. As I was telling you, Mrs. Pattie, I might have been a rich man, if I had had one creature on earth to work for. I can make money; Heaven was good enough to give me talent, and the use of it brings money."

"Why do you not make money for yourself?" she asked; "and then when you grow older, you could live comfortably and without work."

"Pray Heaven, I shall not live to be old," said Owen, with a long sigh. "I am weary of my life now. Never say to me, Mrs. Pattie, that I shall live to be old; I have no wish, unless, indeed, you can give me the boy to cheer my old age. Mrs. Pattie, let me adopt him; I will have him well educated—thoroughly well; I will work hard, I will make a comfortable home for him. I will have him brought up to some profession; I will use all the talents I have, and all the money I make shall be his; he shall have every advantage that is possible; he shall have a happy, good, and useful life if you will give him to me."

"It is a grand offer," said Mrs. Pattie, thoughtfully.

She said to herself that if Lady Ulverston was wise she would accept it; then all trouble, all responsibility respecting the child would be at an end. For her own part, Pattie would have closed with it at once.

"I will not plead for myself," continued Owen, "or tell you how that child would turn death into life, night into day, for me; I am so great a stranger to happiness, that I have no right to expect any; but, oh, Mrs. Pattie, if I had that boy to make sunshine and happiness for me! It is not an unusual thing that I ask; people often adopt children."

"As far as I am concerned, Mr. Mitchel," said Pattie, "I give my consent; but I must ask my lady what she thinks."

"You are very good," he said, gratefully; "you shall never repent the trust you place in me by giving me the child."

Then Pattie did what she had long desired to do—read him a long lecture on the folly of living alone, and always being sad and lonely.

"No man," she said, in her homely fashion, "should think his life lost, because he has wanted one woman to

love him, and she would not. There are many women in the world," she said, "quite as fair and as lovable as the one you make yourself so wretched about. Try to love one you can have, instead of loving one who will not have you."

Very sensible words, but they did not touch Owen Roden.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A STARTLING COINCIDENCE.

He had tried hard to believe that it was but a wretched fancy, to dismiss it from his mind, to say to himself that it was but a mad fancy, an accidental likeness; yet the third day after this found him waiting for Pattie. He knew not what he had to say, nor what he expected to hear.

Pattie began to feel more and more sure that he admired her. She liked him; she had the sense to discern in him a superior character; she saw that he had talent, that he had genius; she admired his handsome face, his melancholy even had a charm for her. Pattie in her busy life had neither time nor thought for love or lovers, but now the time had come when she opened her heart to the warm, genial influence of love. She was pleased and flattered to think that this man, whom every one thought and spoke so well of, who was known for his avoidance of all women, liked her; it was a grand compliment to pay her, one that both flattered and delighted her and made her like him.

"Have you come to any decision about the child?" he asked. "Have you thought over what I said about him?"

"Yes, I have thought a great deal of it, but I have come to no decision. I do not like to decide on such a question without advice; I must consult my lord or my lady first."

"My lord will say 'Yes,' I am sure," she said; "and my lady—well, what can she say about it? Does she really take any great interest in the child?"

"Yes," answered Pattie; "I may say that Lady Ulverston really likes him. She was very kind to him when he first came, and she has been kind to him ever since."

"She would be all the more likely, then, to approve what is for his benefit."

"She would do that, certainly," said the maid. "I—I spoke to her once about the child's future, and she told me

that she would charge herself with his education and future; that is why I hardly like to speak to her about any other plan; it would seem as though I were dissatisfied with her intentions for him. I do not know what to do about it."

Owen looked very thoughtful.

"I do not quite see it in that way. If Lady Ulverston is really kind to the boy, and wishes for his advancement in life, she could not do anything better than to intrust him to me. I will make him a gentleman, and he—ah, you do not know what he would be to me! I do not know Lady Ulverston, but it seems to me that no sensible person could object to my offer."

"Have you never seen Lady Ulverston?" asked Pattie, suddenly, looking at him.

"No," he replied; "I have never seen her; how should I?"

"You never come to the Hall? Ah, well! if you were to see her once, you would understand that I feel a great hesitation in speaking to her. She is very beautiful, one of the loveliest women in England, but proud and determined; if you looked in that beautiful face of hers, you would see that, having once made up her mind to a thing, she does not like to be thwarted."

"I must see her," he said. "I think I could persuade her, although I may seem to fail with you."

Pattie looked up again hurriedly.

"You must not speak to her about this, at least until I have prepared her to bear it," she said.

Owen looked and felt surprised; it seemed to him that Lady Ulverston must be a very unreasonable person to require any preparation for such a thing as this.

"I do not understand fine ladies," he said, laughingly; "but I must confess I can not see what preparation she will need—the child is nothing to her."

"Nothing in the world, save she likes him and has taken a fancy to him."

"A fancy," he repeated; "mine is not a fancy. I love the child—love him, do you understand?"

"Yes, I quite understand; but why do you love him?"

"It is a strange thing, but he is exactly like some one whom I used to know and to love, a long time since. I never tire of looking in his face and listening to his voice.

I would make him so happy, Mrs. Clarke, if you would give him to me."

"I can not decide just yet; you must wait a few days; one can not settle such a question hastily."

Then Pattie thought that enough had been said about the boy, and it was high time the conversation turned upon herself. He must admire her, or he would not be always waylaying her, waiting for her, sending her flowers. She was quite prepared to like him; it was time he said something to her. She never dearmed that all his attentions to her were merely for the boy's sake; that did not occur to her. Why, if he wanted the boy, why should he not take her as well? So she looked at him half-shyly, the blush deepening on her face.

"I can understand that you, being so lonely, Mr. Mitchel, would like the child; it would give you an interest in lief; but why do you not marry, Mr. Mitchel?"

In spite of himself, a smile curled Owen's lip, he could not help it.

"That is the one question, Mrs. Pattie," he replied, "to which I can find no answer; there is, in fact, no answer," and he smiled again.

That smile, softening his face, made him handsomer than ever, and Pattie admired him still more. She did her best to try a little coquetry with him, but she might as well have tried flirtation by the side of an open grave. Still no thought of this came to her. She told him many little anecdotes as to the superiority of married life, to which Owen made no reply, and they parted as the sun set in the west, without dreaming of the tragedy that hung over them.

The next evening Owen could not rest; he was there again, ready to meet Pattie as she crossed the path. This time she was not alone, she had the boy with her. Owen's face brightened at the sight of him, and the boy bounded to meet him. Then Pattie wondered if it struck him what a happy party they would be, the three together. She looked anxiously in his face, but there she read that he had forgotten her, and was thinking only of the child.

"I am glad that I met you, Mr. Mitchel," said Pattie. "Mrs. Chiltern sent Johnnie to see me, and I am obliged to take him home; yet I have not really the time to spare.

My lady is waiting for me to dress her. There is a dinner-party at the Hall."

"Shall I take the boy home for you, Mrs. Pattie?" asked Owen. "I am going to the cottage."

"I shall be very glad," said Pattie. "If you are kind enough to take him for me, I may sit down just for a few minutes and rest."

They sat all three together under the shade of the great green trees, listening to the boy's careless prattle.

"I shall be a soldier when I grow up," he said; "I am going away to fight." And the two elder ones looked at each other, asking each other was that the boy's real calling?

Then, after a pleasant interview under the trees, Pattie went away—Owen, taking the child's hand, led him home. They lingered on the way; Owen lay on the soft green grass, watching the white fleecy clouds above his head, while the boy played round him.

Suddenly he looked at the brave little figure.

"So you mean to be a soldier?" he said.

"Yes, and fight; I like fighting," was the warlike answer.

"They will call you Captain Johnnie," said Owen.

"I have another name besides Johnnie," said the boy, proudly. "Pattie says that all gentlemen have two names at least."

Owen smiled.

"What is your other name?" he asked.

The boy looked up with a pleased smile.

"My other name is Owen," he answered; "so that I shall be Captain John Owen when I am a soldier."

Owen Roden's face grew deadly white: he sprung up from the ground and caught the child in his arms.

"That is your name?" he cried. "Tell me that again."

"Owen," said the boy, "John Owen. I like Owen best, but Pattie said I must be called John."

Still he held the child tightly clasped, looking with wondering eyes in the little face.

"I am frightened, and you hurt me," said the boy. "Let me go." Owen loosened his clasp.

"So your name is Owen? My God!" he cried, with

sudden passion, "what can it mean?—this child with Laure's face and my name. What can it mean?"

He was bewildered—the coincidence was so great, he could not understand or realize it. It was like a shock to him. "Owen." Yet need he wonder so much? Owen was a common name—he was not the only one in the world who bore it. Perhaps the boy's father was Owen—yet no; it was not the name for a Frenchman. He would ask Pattie when he saw her again how the boy came with that name.

"It is more than a coincidence," he said; "it seems to me a sign from Heaven that I am to take the boy and make him my own. Heaven has sent him to me, and no one shall take from me my good gift. I will see this proud Lady Ulverston, and I will plead to her with such passion that she shall not refuse me; she must listen to me. I will be heard; Heaven meant it to be so!"

To his simple mind the matter was clear and decided. Heaven must have willed it. He had lost his home, his money, his chance of winning fame; he had lost his hope, his love, his wife; but if Heaven would give him this boy, he would be content, for then his longing heart would have something to satisfy itself on; he would have soemthing to love.

When he led the child to Mrs. Chiltern, he said to her:

"I did not know the little one was called Owen as well as John."

"No one ever uses the name; I have never heard it," said Mrs. Chiltern. "It is an outlandish kind of name, to my thinking."

Some instinct prevented Owen from saying that it was his own name; but as he walked to his solitary lodgings, thought much about it—that the little fellow he was learning to love should be called Owen.

"If I had a son of my own, I would have called him by my own name," he said, "and no other."

Then in his own mind he planned how he should see Lady Ulverston, and persuade her to let him adopt the child.

That was a brilliant evening in August, the lustrous stars were shining overhead, the night wind was heavy with the breath of sweet flowers, and no warning came to him of what would happen before the month was ended.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LADY ULVERSTON ALARMED.

LADY ULVERSTON sat in the drawing-room, not alone, for the little fairy Lily was, as usual, near her. The afternoon was very warm, but my lady looked the picture of cool, sweet, fragrant repose. The windows were all open, and the sun-blinds drawn, so that the lovely, rosy, mellow light was neither too brilliant nor too strong. The room itself was like a dream of beauty, with its pictures, its buhl and marquetry, the thousand and one marvels of art that were scattered over it, the fragrant flowers that perfumed it, the scented fountains from which the spray rose and fell with a silvery murmur; through the open windows the perfumed air came in, and the music of the birds floated in softly, like the sweet, soft music of a dream.

By far the most beautiful object in that room was the beautiful lady who lay, with a book in her hands, on the couch.

Lady Ulverston had grown more beautiful with the years; her magnificent figure and patrician face more peerless; the gold had deepened in her hair, but the dainty bloom on her face was as when she had stood, years ago, with the one temptation of her life before her. She was superbly beautiful, and her life was bright, happy, and pleasant as the dream of a poet. She had succeeded in living down her most bitter remorse and her sharpest pain. She was learning to forget; the one dark shadow of her life was fading rapidly away. The world had flattered and courted her, it had lain at her feet, it had crowned her queen of beauty and grace; that in reaching her throne she had trampled on a man's honest heart was nothing to her. She had learned to love her husband and desire his esteem; she fully appreciated his whole character; she fully appreciated her own position; she enjoyed the advantages of her wealth, rank, and station. Why should she distress herself by looking back on a past that was like no other past in the world?

There was no shadow on her beautiful face now, in the depths of her eyes no sign of sorrow; she looked a brilliant,

beautiful, prosperous woman. Every now and then she laid aside her book and watched the little Lily; and then the love that softened her face made her marvelous to see.

When Lord Ulverston opened the door and entered the room he laughed aloud at the pretty picture of indolent happiness. He sat down by Lady Laure's side.

"I have just heard something that amuses me," he said. "You will lose your lady's-maid if you do not mind, Laure."

"Lose Pattie," she cried. "No, Rudolph, I am not afraid of that."

"I should not be surprised," he continued. "She has found an admirer."

"She has had many," said Lady Laure; "but she will never leave me."

"This will be an exception. I really think Pattie is a fortunate person to have attracted such a man."

"You forget that you have not told me who Pattie's admirer is," said Lady Laure.

"Why, Mitchel, the man who is superintending the alterations; and I assure you that there is not a more clever man, in his way, in England. If Pattie marries him she will do well."

"Has he asked Pattie to marry him?" said Lady Laure.

"I must confess that I am looking ahead," said Lord Ulverston; "but this Mitchel has been quite celebrated for his avoidance of the fair sex; and now every one is much amused at finding that Pattie's dark eyes have won him."

"Have they won him?" asked my lady, negligently.

"We must imagine so; he sends her flowers; he waits for her in the park and in the woods. Why, Laure, if there is anything in it, you will be quite lost without her."

"I will not waste one moment in regret until I know whether the story is true or not. I think if there had been anything in it, Pattie would have told me."

Still, though she laughed and seemed perfectly indifferent, she was perplexed and distressed. If Pattie did ever leave her, how should she manage over her boy? Would Pattie take him or leave him? She could not bear him away from her, that was quite certain; she could not lose sight of him. Yet it was not her habit to fatigue herself

over possibilities; there would be time enough to make herself wretched when Pattie told her.

Night came; mistress and maid were together in my lady's chamber, and still Pattie had said nothing. Lady Laure was silent purposely, so as to give her the chance; then finding she took no advantage of it, she began the subject herself.

"Pattie," she asked, kindly, "is this story that I hear about you true? Have you found an admirer here at Ulvers?"

"Has some one told you that story?" she asked.

"Yes, I have heard some rumor of it. Is it true, Pattie?"

But to her surprise Pattie seemed more distressed than embarrassed.

"My lady," she said, slowly, "I have been wanting to tell you something for a long time. You have heard Lord Ulverston speak, without doubt, of Mr. Mitchel, the—the person who is superintending the alterations."

"Yes," was the careless reply, "I have heard of him."

Pattie looked at the beautiful face of her mistress, then continued:

"It is a very strange thing; but he has taken the greatest possible liking to little Johnnie."

Then Lady Ulverston looked up suddenly, and the expression of her face was quite changed.

"To little Johnnie," she repeated. "Mitchel has taken a fancy to him?"

"I do wrong even to call it a fancy," said Pattie, "it is more than that; he loves the child."

"Loves him," cried Lady Ulverston, "why does he love him?"

"I asked him that very question, my lady, and he told me that it was because the child was so very much like some one whom he had loved."

"He must be a presuming kind of a man," said Lady Laure, indignantly.

"No, he is not that; he is a clever man and all the people here say he might be rich if he cared to save his money. You can not think how he loves the boy."

My lady's face changed again; something of fear and distress moved its bright expression.

"You say that he has known some one like Johnnie—

whom is he like, Pattie? I have not remarked any great likeness to any one."

"He is more like you than any one else," was Pattie's grave answer.

My lady went up to her and grasped her arm.

"Do you think that it is any one that knew me?" she gasped, in terrified tones.

"No; I am quite sure not," was the quick reply. "No one who knew you in those days would recognize you now; it is not in the least likely. It is not that; he fancies he sees a likeness to some one in the child's face; but that may be and is pure imagination. I do not think it worth a moment's thought. He loves the boy so well because he has nothing else to love."

"I thought he cared for you, Pattie," said Lady Laure, quickly.

"He has not spoken to me of myself yet, my lady; he will do so without doubt. At present he has talked to me of nothing but the boy."

"What of him, Pattie?" she asked, in a constrained voice.

"I will tell you, my lady; he loves him. He tells me that in his life he has had great trouble, terrible sorrow; and in the love of this child he could forget them all."

"How strange," said Lady Laure.

"He seems to have a good position," said Pattie. "He says that he can make plenty of money, and he wants to adopt the boy."

Lady Laure could only repeat the words.

"Adopt him—how strange."

"He thinks, of course, my lady, that the boy belongs to me; and he promises to bring him up as a gentleman, to educate him, to do everything in the world for him, if I will only give my consent to his adopting him. He is never tired of trying to persuade me; he said yesterday if it would please me he would live here always."

Lady Laure's face brightened as she looked up with a smile.

"That sounds to me, Pattie, more as though he wanted to marry you than to adopt the child."

"I do not think so, my lady; he is very earnest about it; he said he would try to see you about it."

"Why see me?" she asked, in a voice of alarm. "Sure-

ly you have not said that I have any special interest in the boy."

"I have kept the secret too long and too faithfully to betray it now," said Pattie, quietly. "I told him that I could not decide about accepting his offer without consulting you, as you had promised to send the boy to school; and it would seem as though I had slighted your offer. He understood that, and said that he would speak to you himself. He does indeed love the boy, my lady; his face brightens when he sees him. It is quite natural, too, that a lonely man should long for something to love."

"Lonely men marry, as a rule, Pattie; they do not go about the world adopting children."

"I asked him why he did not marry, and he said it was one of the questions that he could not answer."

"It seems very strange," said Lady Laure, musingly. "I have not seen him yet, Pattie, this Mr. Mitchel. What is he like?"

The maid's face grew bright and rosy as she tried to describe him. He was tall, handsome, strong, but always melancholy; he was clever; she had heard that Lord Ulverston said that his talents amounted to genius. "The best way to settle it is to see him for yourself, my lady," continued Pattie; "you can speak with an air of authority; you either accept or refuse—my words have no weight with him."

"I am quite willing to see him," said Lady Laure, "indeed I am anxious to do so; it is so wonderful for one quite a stranger to us to take such an interest in the boy, that I am curious to see him; but, Pattie, he can not have the child."

"I did not expect you would like to part with him, my lady," said the maid.

"Part with him!" she cried. "I would give my heart's blood sooner than give him up!"

"Then you will tell Mr. Mitchel that you have undertaken the charge of his future, and do not feel inclined to give it up?"

"Something of that kind," says my lady, languidly. "When is he coming, Pattie?"

"To-morrow evening, my lady. Lord Ulverston will be away; and I thought if he came then you would be able to speak to him at your leisure."

"That will do," said Lady Ulverston. "I had forgotten that Lord Ulverston dines at Langdon Court; then I shall see what this admirer of yours is like, Pattie."

After which she dismissed the whole matter from her mind.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE WOMAN THAT BETRAYED HIM.

SUCH a beautiful August day and Owen Roden knows that this evening he is to see the mistress of Ulvers, Lady Ulverston, the peerless and beautiful, who does not like flowers. He did not think much about her, but he thought a great deal as to what words he should use in pleading for the boy; he did not think he should have much difficulty. What did this fashionable, beautiful Lady Ulverston care for the little orphan?

"When I can show her," he thought, "all the benefits I can confer upon him, she will be quite willing to save herself the expense and trouble."

The only fine lady he had ever known—of whom he had had the least experience—was Lady Cardin, and he knew that she was always most particular as to the appearance of people; so for the first time in many years poor, simple, honest Owen looked in the glass with some little interest, and took some pains to look well. It was a good, handsome, loving face, but terribly marked and lined with trouble.

Pattie sent a little note to say that Lady Ulverston would see Mr. Mitchel in the evening; and she advised him to be at the Hall by eight o'clock.

When Lord Ulverston was from home my lady never troubled herself about a long, toilsome state dinner; she dined earlier and without ceremony—she did so on this day. So it happened that, going home in the afternoon after a ramble in the park, for the first time Owen Roden saw her.

He had been measuring some trees; they wanted removing to open out space where a fernery was to be made. He had measured them, and he stood in the golden sunlight quietly planning what he should do. He did not see her just at first, nor did she pass very near him. Suddenly

raising his eyes he saw her crossing the glade lower down; saw a magnificently beautiful woman, superbly dressed, walking with a free, grand, royal grace, her glorious face unveiled and turned in his direction; saw her, and caught his breath with a low cry, clutched the branch of a tree lest he should fall, looked until it seemed that he could see no more.

For he had recognized her—he knew her. Time had deepened her beauty, heightened her loveliness, changed her from a beautiful girl into a magnificent woman; still he knew her. He had looked into those eyes, he had kissed those lips, that beautiful head had rested on his breast—it was Laure, his wife.

He wondered afterward that he did not die in that minute: the rush of mighty seas was in his ears, a great mist came before his eyes; a great tearless sob came from his lips.

"Great Heaven," he cried, "I am mad—it can not be Laure!"

It was well she did not see the white, wild, tortured face. The color had all left it; the lips were white as those of a dead man; his burning eyes followed every motion of that beautiful, graceful figure.

She stood for a few minutes watching a pretty bird that sat singing on the low branch of a tree; she smiled as she listened, and he knew that smile so well; he had watched it so often deepen as it went from the eyes to the lips. Then she walked on slowly, still smiling.

The earth did not open, the skies did not fall, yet neither would have startled him so much. He had dreamed of seeing her again, he had thought of a thousand plans by which he might see her; and now she was standing before him with the sunlight on her face, and he was stricken dumb. He had opened his white, stiff lips to cry out her name, but no sound came from them; he tried to follow her, he could not move; he tried to attract her attention, but it seemed to him that his limbs were paralyzed.

"Oh, Heaven, could that be Laure, his beautiful, loving Laure?"

He watched her as she passed down the woodland glade; then, without cry or sound, he fell on his face like a dead man, and so he lay until one of the laborers passing by

saw him, and thinking he was ill raised him. Owen looked at the man.

"Did you see a lady pass down there some time since?" he asked; "a lady dressed in pink and gray."

"Yes, I have seen her; you mean Lady Ulverston," he answered.

"Lady Ulverston."

So that was the end of it! Laure was Lady Ulverston; she had left him, only Heaven knew how or why, and she had married the man who was now his master.

"Lady Ulverston," he repeated the name over and over again to himself; he was stunned as a man who had been wounded and left for dead. Laure was Lady Ulverston. She had left him, his true love, his pretty, simple home for this. She who had been mistress of that little cottage was now mistress of this lordly place. The man who had raised him looked at him in bewilderment.

"I have been ill?" said Owen to him.

He nodded in reply, and went on, leaving him alone.

He flung himself on the soft, thick grass, praying with passionate tears and passionate prayers that he might die, that God, in His mercy, would save him from more torture, would keep him from going mad with the weight of his own despair.

So that was Laure. While in his own fashion he had sought her the wide country through, she had been here, mistress of this magnificent domain. How had it come to pass? How had she, his wife, poor and unknown—by what means had she become Lady Ulverston?

Then, with a loud cry he rose, wrath and anger surging in him. He had been so cruelly, so basely betrayed. He was not a gentleman; his hands were brown with toil, his face bronzed by the sun, but he could feel intensely, sensitively, as any other man. He would tear her from this white-handed aristocrat—he would force her to go back with him; she was his own, his wife.

Then his eyes fell on the greensward where she had stood, and the memory of the beautiful face flashed over him like a light. He rushed to the spot, and falling on his knees kissed it because she had stood there. His own words came back to him with wonderful strength; he remembered how she had stood looking at him, and had asked him, "What should you do, Owen, if I ran away

from you?" And he had answered, "I should follow you and die humbly at your feet;" words that had little meaning in them when he uttered them, but which were now so full of life. He remembered that he had to see her that evening—this wife of his, whom he had lost for so long. It showed the state of his mind; he did not remember why he had to see her. He had forgotten all about the boy; he was mad with the most terrible of all madness—wounded love and burning jealousy.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"LAURE, DO YOU KNOW ME?"

He had found her at last. His love, his anger, his madness found vent in a bitter cry that drove the startled song-birds from the trees; it startled even himself.

"Nay," he said to himself; "if I am to see her I must keep my senses. I must not go mad. I must collect all my thoughts. I must be myself."

He walked slowly through the park; the astonished look of one of the keepers who met him startled him again.

"Excuse me, Mr. Mitchel," said the man, "you look so worn, so haggard. Have you been ill? Have you fallen? Your coat is all over grass and leaves."

Owen looked at him abruptly.

"Am I presentable?" he said.

"No, that you are not," laughed the man, "you frighten me."

So he must go home again, after all his care, and remake his toilet, ready to meet his wife.

He never knew how he reached his lodgings. All the way he saw Laure's face before him; the sunlight, the rosy clouds in the west, the flowers, the trees were nothing; they had no existence for him; all he thought of was Laure. He had seen her again, and the sight of her had driven him mad.

He brushed the stains from his coat; he washed his hands, all covered with dust; he made himself look as well as he could, laughing a mad, bitter laugh to himself as he remembered how often she had stood by laughing while he had made himself presentable to go out with her.

When he started for the Hall it was nearly twilight, and

the lovely night was coming on. The sun had set, the air was full of fragrance, the birds were singing their vesper hymn, the whole world lay sweet, smiling and fragrant.

He was going to see his wife, his beautiful young wife who had betrayed him years ago; he was going to speak to the woman who had betrayed him, left him, abandoned and dishonored him; he laughed aloud in the bitterness of his heart, in the keen, bitter pain.

"My wife is a grand lady, and a false woman; yet I have never said one word against her, and I never will. She may have grown tired of my poverty; she was so bright and gladsome. It was a dull life for her; but may God bless her. I will never say one word more harsh than that."

He formed no plan as he went along; he never said to himself what he should say, what he should do; he was bewildered; only one idea came to him; he was going to see his wife—his wife!

"Laure," he cried, with a passion of tears. Even to utter her name seemed to him, after all these years of silence, so sweet. Then the grand picturesque hall of Ulvers came in sight; and once more he wondered how his darling came to all these splendors. Could he be mistaken? After all, was it Laure? Had he been deceived? He should soon know now, for he was standing in the grand entrance-hall.

Pattie came to him, blushing and smiling, coy and shy; but Owen, in the great tragedy of his sorrow, never even saw her—did not know whose eyes were looking into his, whose voice was speaking to him in such dulcet tones.

"My lady will see you, Mr. Mitchel," she said. "Will you walk this way?"

Mechanically he followed her through the magnificent suite of rooms, through the broad, grand corridors, past the pictures and statues of world-wide fame, past jardinières filled with the most costly flowers. He looked around him in wonder. And it was for this she had betrayed his true heart and his honest love!

"He does not look either very happy or very pleased," said Pattie to herself, as she ushered him into the boudoir where Lady Ulverston had bade her ask him to wait for her.

Owen entered this beautiful and superb room where

everything of the richest and most magnificent was brought together, where hangings of blue velvet and the finest white lace contrasted with the painted ceilings and the beautifully painted panels of the walls. The pictures, even to his untrained eye, seemed priceless; he saw a white marble Flora with a basket of heliotrope in her hands; he saw a copy of the famous Diana of the Louvre, and another of the Greek Slave; he was dazzled by the wonder and beauty of the place. The furniture was delicate and artistic; books in superb bindings; jeweled ornaments; the most exquisite of old chinas; the most *recherché* little works of art were scattered everywhere; the carpet was like a soft thick mass of flowers.

Then, when he had collected himself, he realized that this was his wife's room. As he stood there he contrasted it with his little parlor at the little cottage. Ah, God! it was for this she had left him!

He looked at the soft, luxurious sofa where her beautiful head had lain, at the book she had just been reading, at the jeweled fan that lay open on the table. A soft, mellow light filled the room; the air was laden with perfume. If there could be—and there is not—any excuse for wrongdoing, she had it here.

How he loathed and hated this splendor. How small and contemptible it seemed to him in comparison with love, truth, and loyalty.

"I might have lost myself for Laure's love," he said; "but never for such gauds as these."

Then the door opened; there was a rustle of trailing silk, a stir of the richly perfumed air; a tall, graceful, stately figure entered, with a certain proud, careless grace that was irresistible.

He was standing near the hangings in the shade, and my lady did not see him at first. When she perceived the tall, silent, motionless figure she did not even raise her proud, sweet eyes to his face. She bowed her head in mute greeting, and going to the table took up the jeweled fan.

"You wished to see me," she said, gently, "in reference to the little boy my maid has adopted?"

Her voice had a luscious, sweet tone. He trembled as he heard it; his heart beat; the blood seemed to flow like

burning fire through his viens; it seemed to him that the throbbing of his heart shook even the room.

He knew her—it was Laure; more beautiful than ever, more graceful, more dignified, with a new and more brilliant loveliness. It was Laure, his wife; yet another Laure, so magnificent, so queenly, that he was filled with awe. The dress of white silk with its golden fringe, fell in sweeping folds to the ground, her white neck was clasped by a necklace of purest pearls; on the white breast lay a pearl cross; pearls were twined in the grand coils of golden brown hair; the white, rounded arms were bare to the shoulders, superb bracelets of gold gleamed on them; a sweet subtle perfume seemed to come from the folds of her dress and float round her as she moved—and this was Laure, his beloved young wife, whom he had last seen in her plain print dress. His haggard face grew whiter still as he looked at her in her proud, careless beauty; could it be possible that he had ever clasped that imperial figure in his arms, had he ever kissed that face?

He would have answered her but that the sound of her sweet voice had stricken him dumb; he tried to open his white lips and speak to her; but it seemed to him that sound would come from them never more. She did not seem to wonder at his silence; she was quite accustomed to seeing men stricken into passion by the wonder and magic of her beauty. She thought he was shy, and considerately gave him a few moments to recover himself. She took up the jeweled fan and stirred the fragrant air; he saw the gold gleaming on her white arm, and it maddened him.

"My maid tells me," continued the sweet voice, "that you like the little boy very much."

Still no answer, no word, no movement in the silent figure, no sound; my lady, so gracious with her inferiors, continued:

"I am not surprised at it; he is really a fine little fellow."

Still no answer. My lady leaned back carelessly in her velvet chair; she fanned herself even more vigorously. She said to herself:

"How timid he is. I shall not be able to set him at his ease."

She went on:

"My maid has told me of your generous offer; but I do not see how it can be accepted."

Then there was a sound, a stir; the tall, strong figure came from out of the shadow, walked slowly up to her, looked at her with hot, passionate eyes.

"Laure," he said, in a low, hoarse voice, "do you not know me?"

Ah, my lady, my lady! The proud, graceful calm is gone. She rose with a low, hurried cry; the light seemed to quiver in her jewels. She held up her hands as though to ward off a blow.

"Who are you?" she cried. "What do you mean?"

Then they stood confronting each other, these two, husband and wife, betrayed and betrayer, the true and the false, looking at each other with a full steady gaze; the first throbbing of the passionate outburst that was to follow. She looked at him long and steadily, then the pride died out of her eyes, the color faded from her face, even her lips grew white as marble and quivered with pain.

"Who are you?" she asked.

Then his hot, eager, trembling hands went out to her and clasped her dress.

"Who am I, Laure? Ah, my God! that you should ask my that question! that you ask who I am! I am Owen Roden, your husband, Laure!"

She tried to say "I do not know you," she tried to move away; she tried to turn from him with averted face; but she could do none of these things; she shrunk trembling before him as the wrong-doer always shrinks before the injured. A great quiet dignity seemed to fall over him; he was transformed in that hour of supreme pain and most bitter anguish; a new and grander manhood was his; passion, wounded love, wounded honor, all took a noble form.

"I am Owen Roden, and you know me, Laure, though you try to forget me. I am your husband! Oh, my wife, my wife!"

"You are mistaken," she tried to say; but false as her lips were she could not frame the words.

"There is no mistake. I am Owen Roden, and you are my wife; the beautiful girl whom I loved and married, the wife who deserted me."

Then his hands clasped hers; he drew nearer to her;

his breath flamed hot on her face; she seemed suddenly aroused to a sense of her danger, and springing from him uttered a low cry.

"What do you mean?" she said. "I am Lady Ulverston. I do not understand. What do you mean?"

"You are my wife, Laure. If I loved you less you might deceive me. I loved you so that you can never cheat me; you are my wife; no disguise can hide you from me."

"Hush!" she cried, with a terrified gesture, "do not speak so loud—you—you mistake."

"You are my wife, Laure. I loved you and married you; do you think that I do not know the lips I have kissed, the face I have loved? No disguise on earth could hide you from me!"

She stood quite silent, white and trembling; she made no further attempt to go away from him. Despite her leaving him, her love of luxury and pleasure, she had loved him with the only real love of her life; and now, as she stood faint and helpless in his strong grasp, all the memory of that love came to her, stirring a passionate tumult in her heart, waking up again to a new, vigorous life. She sprung from the people, she had loved him ten thousand times better than she loved Lord Ulverston.

"You could not hide from me, Laure, I love you so well that I could kill you—slay you. I ought to do it. I ought to avenge myself, my outraged honor, my blighted name, my ruined life; I ought to slay you, my false, beautiful wife. I love you well enough to kill you and myself together; and I love you well enough, oh, weak fool that I am, I love you here and kiss the hem of your garment; I love you well enough to go mad for the love of you."

The terrible whiteness of her face gave place to a flush that seemed to burn it; his words touched the very core of her heart; she trembled like a leaf in the wind.

"Look at me, Laure, false wife, dear wife, look at me."

She raised her face to his; then love, fear, remorse, dread, surprise, all flashed over her.

"You know me?" he said.

"I know you, Owen," she whispered, and then she fell at his feet.

He looked for one moment at the beautiful, prostrate figure, at the mass of white silk and gold, at the golden

head and the fair face; he loved her well enough to kill himself in that moment for her sake.

Then bending over her he raised her in his arms and laid her on the little couch, bending over her while she lay there cold and senseless—bending over her he kissed the pale lips with a passion of love and despair. How he kissed them—what long years since he had touched them—what long years since he had been near that beautiful face!

It was pitiful to see how the tears fell from his eyes and dropped on her cheek and he kissed them away—it was pitiful to see the passionate love. No child who had found its mother after a long absence could have caressed her so tenderly. Had she been conscious he would not have done it; as it was, he poured out all the yearning love, the repressed passion of years on her; as it was he kissed her, caressed, lavished his whole soul on her, and she was unconscious of it all.

"My wife! my wife!"

If he could say no more to her those words seemed to express all.

Then he saw a faint quiver on her lips, a faint thrill of her eyelids, and, rising, he stood at some little distance from her; it would never do for her to find him worshiping her in that mad fashion.

"I ought to have killed her," he said to himself; "and yet, Heaven knows, I love her better than ever."

CHAPTER XL.

"THAT CHILD IS YOURS AND MINE."

HER beautiful eyes were open and looking at him.

"Owen," she said, faintly; then the sense of it all seemed to flash over her—she remembered. "Owen," she said again, "how did you find me?"

Then he flung himself on his knees by her side; he cried to her:

"You recognize me? You do not pretend? You hide no longer from me? Oh, Laure, my beloved! I can pardon you anything now that you have spoken to me again; now that you have uttered my name. I was afraid that you meant to drive me from your presence with scornful words;

that you would persist in saying that I was mistaken. Oh, my wife! my wife! say my name once again!"

Poor, simple Owen; his great, honest heart yearned for her; all the rankling memory of his wrongs died; he forgot everything as he looked at her beautiful face except that he had found her.

"Say my name again; speak to me, my darling, my love. My soul longs for you; my heart aches for you; my ears thirst for your voice; my lips thirst; speak to me, Laure. Oh, my God! that I should love you so blindly, so madly!"

She dare not take from his the hands he clasped with such mad passion. She dare not avoid him when he bent over her and kissed her lips.

"For such long—oh, my darling!" he said—"for such long, terrible years. I have been a wanderer on the face of the earth; I have not rested, or slept, or laughed since I lost you, my Laure. The hart pants for the spring water, I have so longed for you. I have gone mad with my longing, and now I have found you. Oh, my love! my love!"

His worn, haggard face fell weeping on the glistening folds of her dress; his voice died away in a passion of tears. She saw, what was perfectly true, that he had forgotten everything else in the joy of seeing her. Her sin—her betrayal—were forgotten; he only knew that she was there, living before him. She could not recall to him what she was, what she had done; it would have been cruel as the shot that tears the life from a little bird.

She lay still and silent until the passion of his love and grief was exhausted. Then he raised his face and looked at her; a crimson blush replaced the pallor of his countenance.

"I kiss you," he said, "and I ought to slay you. I ought to avenge myself. Oh, Laure, what have you done! what have you done to me?"

The burning sense of shame had come back to him, then the hot, indignant protest against his dishonor and her perfidy. He rose from his knees; he flung the perfumed folds of her robes far from him; he stood before her defiant, despairing, grand and great in his simple manhood.

"You left me—why did you do it? Was it for gold? Was it for a light, wanton love? Why was it?"

Then she saw the lion of wrath was roused in him at last, he had been so passionately loving that she had begun to

think he would not be angry. She saw it now, this storm she had dreaded rising higher and higher, and she cowered before it.

"Why did you leave me? I had not much money, but I had a great heart full of love. I was poor, but I worshiped you. What right had you to leave me?"

"None," she answered, clinching her white hands; "none."

"Do you know all you have done to me?" he cried; "do you know that you have ruined me, body and soul? I have prayed for death, but not for Heaven, since you left me. I had genius—so they say; it has been wasted. They tell me that I could have been a great man, had I studied and persevered; you killed my genius. I made money—and you value money, Laure; it was all dirt and dross to me, because you were not there to share it. I had hopes as every man has of a home, where wife and children should love me; you trampled them in the dust. You have made my whole life bare and desolate; you have taken my heart, which loved you so truly, and crushed it. You have trampled out my life under your feet."

"Forgive me, Owen," she said, faintly.

"I gave you love—you have given me dishonor; I took you into my heart and home—you have covered me with ignominy; I gave you my name—you have stained it; I gave you my heart—you have broken it. I say that if I had true manhood in me I should kill you for what you have done to me. Why did you do it?"

She saw the storm of his mighty wrath rising higher and higher; she trembled before it, for she knew that he loved her so well. If she tried, she could soothe and quiet him. She had not been able to think; her mind was all in confusion and chaos; she had one clear idea and it was that she must prevent this, her terrible secret, from being known; she must soothe and quiet him.

"I am sorry, Owen," she said. "No one but myself knows how sorry, and I have suffered because I loved you."

"You say so now; you did so when you left me; a few words, though kindly spoken, will not give me back my lost love, Laure—my lost life, my blighted name—they are but words."

"I was so sorely tempted, and I was so young," she said.

"Who tempted you? Tell me who tempted you, and I

will slay him. Who tempted my darling from me? Who took my wife from my arms? I will slay him, Laure."

"It was no man," she answered; "no man could have taken me from you. I loved you. Ah, believe me, I loved you, and I suffered."

He stood quite silent for a few minutes, doing fierce, hard battle with himself, suddenly he remembered why he was there. Believing this to be Lady Ulverston, he had come to ask her for the boy—the child who had Laure's face, Laure's voice, and his own name. A thrill of pain, sharp—not like lightning, seemed to pass over him; he forgot again for some few moments, his own wrongs faded again; he went up to her, and raising her face to his looked into it.

"The child," he cried; "in the name of Heaven, tell me, Laure, whose is that child?"

Her face fell; he saw the red flush mount even to her temples.

"The child—what child, Owen?"

She clung to this portion of her secret while she could.

"What child?" she repeated, in a low voice that faltered over the words.

"You know—you know, he has your eyes, those sweet, cruel eyes, and he has my name; he has your voice, and you love him—he said so. Oh, Heaven speak to me quickly—whose child is he? Laure, I tremble—I shall die unless you speak quickly; whose boy is he?"

"Pattie's nephew," she answered, faintly.

But a new spirit had come to him.

"He is not," he cried; "I do not believe you; you are speaking falsely. He has my name; he has your voice. Oh, Heaven, she will not tell me; Laure, be pitiful to me—who is he?"

A quick thought told her it was useless to deceive him now that he was on the track—that she had better tell him the whole truth and throw herself entirely on his mercy. She looked up at him.

"Spare me, Owen," she said; "I am a guilty woman. That child is yours and mine."

He turned away with a deep moan; her perfidy was even greater than he believed.

"And you have kept him from me," he said; "you would have let him live and die without seeing me—my

own child, and you have never taught him my name. Wife and—oh, Heaven, what have I done that I should deserve this?—wife and child."

"Will you listen to me, Owen?" she asked, gently. He turned his white, pained face to her.

"Yes, I will listen. Tell me first, Laure, was it fair to take my child from me; was it just?"

"No; I have neither been just nor fair to you. I am a miserable sinner; I am a guilty, wretched woman. Show me pity, Owen."

The great, loving heart melted at the words; he worshiped her so entirely, that he could not hold out one moment against her.

"Listen to me," she said, "and I will tell you the whole story. Owen, I will hide nothing from you."

He stood tall and erect, his worn face softened now by the sound of her voice. She stood before him, her white hands clasped with fevered energy, her beautiful face raised in its pleading to him.

"Listen to me, Owen," she said again, "and you will see how terrible my temptation was—you will understand how I fell, and why I am here."

It was a strangely dramatic scene—the magnificent room, with its bright flowers and mellow light; the tall, haggard man, with the worn, handsome face, contrasting in his homely attire with the elegant, beautiful woman in her trailing robes and gleaming jewels: in his face truth, honesty, tender love were written; in hers, shame and sorrow.

Her words were poured out in a quick, passionate flow; he listened quietly and without comment.

She told him all, making no excuses for herself, not hiding one single detail from him; telling him of her flight, her sorrow, her resolve to return to him—her pride and exultation when she saw what her birthright was, her horror and fear when she found that in a short time she should be a mother; how with Pattie's help, she passed through the ordeal; then of her uncle's desire for her marriage and its fulfillment.

He listened until she had finished, and the passionate flow of words, that sounded like a ripple of faint music, had died away.

"Now do you see, Owen?" she said.

He turned from her, with a low moan on his white lips.

"Yes, I understand," he answered, quietly. "Your love for me so weak and faint, so feeble and little worth that these gauds outweighed it. You did not leave me for another love. You left me because that which they call the soul in women hungered after luxury. Oh, weak of love, weak of heart. I have no reproach to make; none would reach you, none would touch you. I have nothing to say."

"But, Owen," she cried, "you forgive me?" The broken heart of the man was shown in his face.

"I forgive you," he said; "may God do the same; you will need it."

And turning from her, he buried his face in his hands.

CHAPTER XLI.

"YOU HAVE BROKEN MY HEART."

THE little ormolu clock chimed nine; the sound of it startled Lady Laure. Lord Ulverston would soon return. She began to wonder what she was to do for the present. What was to become of her in the future she did not dream of considering. One thing was certain: Owen must go before Lord Ulverston returned. She went up to him, and gently laid her hand on the bowed head.

"Owen," she said, "speak to me."

She was shocked when he raised his face; it looked as though twenty years of sorrow had passed over it. He looked at her in hopeless despair.

"I have nothing to say, Laure; you have broken my heart."

"You have forgiven me?" she asked, anxiously.

"Yes. I have forgiven you," he said; but the very tone of his voice was hopeless.

"And you will show mercy—you will be pitiful to me?" she continued.

"Yes," he replied, briefly.

She grew more hopeful as he grew hopeless. Bending down, she whispered to him.

"You will not betray my secret, Owen?"

He looked at her with the same expression of hopeless despair.

"Do you remember, Laure," he said, "that once you

asked me what I should do, if you ran away from me? My answer was that I should follow you through the world, and die humbly at your feet. I repeat the words. I shall die at your feet and die dumb."

His patient endurance, his despair touched her more deeply than she cared to own. Still time was pressing—at any moment now her husband might enter, and if he found Owen there in that frame of mind, it was quite impossible to tell how the affair would end, or what would be done. He saw that she looked anxiously at the clock.

"You want me gone," he said; "I will go, Laure."

She blushed as she answered him; then he repeated; "I will go, Laure; but I must know more about my son. When and where will you see me?"

"To-morrow. Do you know King Charles's Vale? I will be there to-morrow afternoon at three."

Then she rang and Pattie answered the bell. Her quick eyes noted the distress on Owen's face.

"My lady has refused," she thought, to herself. She was doubly kind to him as she showed him out. If he could not have the boy, he might think more about having herself.

He was very silent, and almost forgot to say good-night to her; but Pattie cheered herself by thinking that was all owing to his disappointment about the child.

He had not left the house many minutes before Lord Ulverston returned, but they did not meet. Pattie had no time to speak to Lady Laure until she was in her own room.

"You refused, my lady?" she said. "I knew it by his face."

"Not quite," said Lady Laure; "I have to see him once more."

Then Pattie hung her head with a bashful air of one who expects to be complimented.

"Pray excuse my asking the question, my lady, but do you like him?"

Lady Laure looked at her bewildered, then she suddenly remembered that she and Lord Ulverston had discussed the probabilities of Owen's marrying her. She shuddered at the thought; what a coil she had woven round herself.

Then, seeing the cloud that was coming over Pattie's face, she said, quickly.

"He seems very intelligent, very honest and honorable, Pattie."

"Oh, thank you, my lady," said the girl, gratefully, as though the praise had been conferred on herself.

And then Lady Laure was alone with her despair—alone and able to realize that Owen had found her out. It was strange, but she felt no fear of him; she felt quite sure that he would never betray her, that he would not go to Lord Ulverston and betray her secret; that he would not denounce her to the world—that he would never expose her to shame or suffering; her faith in him was strong. It was strong, but when she realized her own feelings, and understood her own mind, her prevailing sentiment was one of deep regret for Owen; she felt so sorry for him; his changed face, from which all the honest happiness had gone, his despair, his passionate love touched her keenly.

She felt more sorrow for him than fear for herself; she knew her influence over him; if she bade him to keep her secret, he would keep it until death; if she bade him go away and leave her in peace, he would go; she had no fear of him; but she was so intensely sorry for him; the tears fell from her eyes as she recalled the signs of suffering on that haggard face, as she thought of his worshiping love, his passionate devotion; no love could be like his; none so true, so deep, so loyal, and for one moment she asked herself if her sin had profited her? if all that she had gained was worth what she had lost? whether that love would not have made her happier than all her wealth had done? whether, with Owen and her boy, it would not have been a brighter life? Then she answered herself No. Love was very well, but it did not suffice for her; she wanted more, she wanted life, wealth, fashion, a thousand and one things that love could not have brought her.

What must she do? How would it end? She could not tell; she must see Owen again; she must hear what he had to say when he had recovered from the shock, and had collected his thoughts.

She could not sleep or rest; of all the thoughts that had ever come to her of what was possible, this had not occurred; she had never thought that Owen would find her; of late, life had been so bright and beautiful that she had in some measure half forgotten the dark background. The

idea of Owen seeking her or finding her had not occurred to her; it was quite a new combination.

Now that she was alone, it was strange how her heart went back to him; she had never, patrician as she was, loved Lord Ulverston half so well as she loved this stalwart, honest, loyal man who worshiped her.

As she sat by the window that night, unable to sleep or rest, all the memory of that brief married life came back to her again; his great passionate love, her sorrow at leaving him. The present fell from her; she was a girl once more, standing in the little room, taking the wedding ring from her finger with weeping eyes and aching heart; and now this man whom she had loved with the one great love of her life, this man whom she had betrayed and abandoned was near her again.

Poor, honest, loving Owen, how worse than cruel she had been to him.

"I ought to have sent the boy to him," she thought; "it was cruel of me to keep all knowledge of the boy from him."

It showed her implicit trust and faith in him, that though he had found her, she had no fear of him, no fear that he would denounce her, or betray or reveal her secret, or drag her down from her high position; she knew that she could safely trust her life and her fair name in his hands.

It was not that, it was not fear that drove sleep from her pillow and rest from her brain; it was remorse for the wrong, pity for the man who loved her so well. Her pity for him was so great, it almost killed her.

It was strange that in all these years she had not grown to love him less; that at the sight of him all the old love, poor as it was at its best, should have again sprung into life.

Strange that she should have to battle, not with the fear of exposure, but with the most loving pity that ever filled any woman's heart to oevrflowing. She had to see him again, what they should decide on she could not tell.

After a long, sleepless, wretched night, Lady Laure roused herself to meet the coming day—a day she never forgot, although she lived years afterward.

Pattie looked at her with scrutinizing eyes.

"You have not slept, my lady," she said; "and you have been troubling over the boy. I can see it by your face; you have no color, and your eyes look quite dim."

"Then you must make me look fresh and gay," said my lady.

Pattie opened the windows, that the fresh air might freshen my lady's bloom; she found fragrant waters in which to bathe the pale face. Lady Laure soon looked like herself again; she went down to the breakfast-room, but Lord Ulverston was not satisfied with her appearance.

"You are not looking so bright as usual this morning, Laure," he said, anxiously. "I am afraid you had a dull day yesterday, and that I did wrong to leave you."

"I was not dull, Rudolph," she answered.

Then, remembering what an eventful day yesterday had been, a burning flush rose to her face; she tried in vain to control it, but could not. Her husband looked curiously at her.

"My dear Laure, why are you blushing so furiously?" he asked. "What is the matter?"

"Nothing; but you must not think I am so foolish and unreasonable as to feel dull whenever you go out."

She dreaded arousing Lord Ulverston's suspicions. She had no fear of Owen; she was, in some measure, afraid of the master of Ulvers; he would never shield her and spare her as Owen would; she must be careful not to arouse his suspicions, yet he was looking quite curiously at her.

"I do not think I have ever seen you blush in that way before, Laure," laughed Lord Ulverston. "I have a little plan to propose to you. I have not been through the gardens lately; will you spend the morning with me there? We will take Lily with us. You can have your books, and rest by the Great Fountain, if you will."

Any other day she would have refused, she would have said that she did not care for fountains or flowers; but now just at this moment, she did not wish to raise his suspicions or give him cause for one moment's thought.

"I should like that," she said, "if only, Rudolph, you will not want me to admire all your flowers."

"You shall not be teased about them," he said; "but after being parted from you all day yesterday, I can not lose sight of you this morning—yet I must go through the gardens."

So the lovely little Lily was brought into the room, and the footman was sent to the Great Fountain, with a footstool for my lady and her books.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE SCENE IN THE GARDEN.

It was pretty to see little Lily's joy when she heard that she was to go with mamma and papa to spend the whole morning in the gardens; the lovely little face flushed with joy and delight. Lady Ulverston smiled at the child's delight, and while she smiled her thoughts went to the other child, who was perhaps dearer, because he was first.

"We shall have a pleasant morning, Laure," said Lord Ulverston; "see how pleased Lily is."

The Great Fountain, as it was called, stood in the midst of the gardens at Ulvers; it was one of the prettiest spots in the world, although the alterations and improvements had not been carried out there.

The fountain was a large one, and the spray seemed to cool the warm air; it stood in the midst of a beautiful green grass-plot, forming a lovely green cloister, shaded and cool. Lord Ulverston liked the spot; he often read his papers and letters there. Lady Laure preferred it to any other part of the grounds.

The footman took my lady's footstool, her books, a little stand of fruit for Miss Lily—everything they would be likely to want—my lady's fan, her parasol; and Lord Ulverston looked round with a smile.

"We will make this spot our head-quarters," he said. "You shall sit there, and from time to time I will come to you; Lily will play on the grass."

It was a pretty home picture: the golden sunlight—the shade under the vine leaves—the silver spray of the fountain rising and falling with a musical murmur—the thick, green grass—the lovely, fairy child who played on it, the handsome, aristocratic man, who looked so fond and so proud of her—the beautiful, fair-haired woman, with her exquisite face and stately figure, looking doubly charming in her cool morning dress of rich white muslin.

My lady leaned back in her chair and took up a book, while the fairy Lily amused herself by gathering the most blooming of flowers, and putting them on her mamma's dress.

It was indeed a pleasant home picture. No one could have guessed the terrible background of sin that darkened it.

Lord Ulverston was delighted with the improvements.

"It was one of the most fortunate ideas I ever had; but I do not know, Laure, what I should have done without Mitchel."

She smiled with languid grace. He did not see the shudder that passed over her as she realized that Owen called himself Mitchel, and it was of Owen he spoke.

"If he knew—" she looked at his proud, patrician face; "if he knew."

"I wonder," said Lord Ulverston, "if Mitchel is about here; I should like to speak to him. I will send for him. I think, Laure, this place might be much improved."

She tried to look careless, but her face grew pale; she tried to speak carelessly, but her lips quivered.

"It might be improved," she said; "but never mind about it now."

"Yes, it might be much improved—very much, indeed," he said, "I will send for Mitchel."

She made one more effort to save herself and Owen the pain of meeting.

"Do not send for him now, Rudolph," she said; "Lily does not like strangers."

He laughed.

"Laure does not like being teased over the gardens," he said; "but really, if it will not annoy you, I should like to see him while the ideas are fresh in my mind."

If it had been any one else she would have said "No," but she was afraid of exciting the least suspicion over Owen; if she declined or refused to have him sent for, her husband would perhaps wonder why it was. She feared even the least dawn of suspicion in his mind; it would be torture to Owen, double torture to her, still it must be done. She turned her face to little Lily, as she spoke:

"Send for him of course, Rudolph, if it pleases you; what can it matter to me? I am glad that you should be pleased."

She spoke so indifferently that he did not believe she cared either one way or the other; he went to one of the gardeners working at some little distance, and asked him to send Owen.

She never knew how long a time passed until he came. She never knew how the time passed. Her whole soul seemed to listen for his coming. Lily brought her flowers, but her mother did not even see her; Lord Ulverston spoke to her—she answered him so completely at random that he thought she was engrossed in her book.

Then she heard him; the deep, rich voice had lost all its music. Lord Ulverston was speaking to him; she did not dare raise her eyes, lest Owen should utter some exclamation and ruin her.

Then she heard Lord Ulverston say:

"I think it would be a great improvement, Mitchel, do you not? Come on to the grass-plot; Lady Ulverston is here, with my little daughter. Just come this way."

Then she realized her danger; he was coming into her presence. She looked up, although the effort was a great one, and met his glance, coldly, steadily, firmly; there was power and command in her eye; the expression in her face said plainly as a face could speak: "Silence, do not betray me; silence for your very life." It had the desired effect.

He doffed his cap, and bowed lowly to her; then his face blanched and quivered with pain; that his heart was stabbed with keenest pain, who knew? He bowed before her, and she thought of his words, "I would die humbly at your feet." Then Lord Ulverston talked to him for several minutes about the vinery. Owen never heard—did not understand, his heart and his senses had gone out from him to the beautiful woman who had belonged to him and no other.

There was never surely, a more tangled scene. Lady Ulverston gave no sign of it, except that her face was a trifle paler, and her jeweled hand trembled. He might have taken a terrible revenge on her then if he would; he might have told the story before her face as she sat, but he would not; he would never injure her; he would die a thousand deaths first.

As he made no answer, Lord Ulverston fancied he did not approve; it never occurred to him that Mitchel was so absorbed in thought that he did not even hear him.

"You do not approve of my suggestion," he said; "we will take a good look round and tell me what you think."

He did so, and as his glance wandered over the flowers and grass he saw Lily; Lady Laure knew that he had seen

her by the sudden passion in his face. He seemed to forget everything, except that here was Laure's child; he went abruptly from Lord Ulverston's side, and going to the little one raised her in his arms, looking intently in the sweet little face. Lord Ulverston might have been offended, had it been any one else; but Mitchel was a genius, and most things are permitted to a genius.

"That is my little daughter," he said. "Are you fond of children?"

Owen looked from the child's face to my lady. She trembled with alarm and looking up into his face with a sweet smile, said:

"That is my little daughter, Mr. Mitchel."

She knew the smile and the voice would disarm him. It did so—the child almost fell from his arms. Lord Ulverston smiled, thinking himself, what a strange man this Mitchel was.

Poor Owen, he tried in vain not to look at his beautiful wife—he tried in vain not to look at the lovely child, Laure's little daughter; but the temptation was too strong for him—he longed to cry out; he longed to assert his right to her; she was his, that lovely child at her feet ought to have been his; he could not keep his eyes from them, and Lord Ulverston smiled again to himself, thinking it was very evident that Mitchel had never seen such a beautiful lady or lovely child before.

It was torture to him; no pain could have been inflicted on that sensitive, loving nature so keen, so bitter, as to force him to stand in her beautiful presence unrecognized. He hated himself for standing there mute and dumb—she was his wife, his own; this man, with all his wealth and position, had no right to her; she was his. It was torture to them both; she heard his voice, she could see his face; she longed to go to him, to comfort him, and she was compelled to sit still.

Oh, that little child; how poor Owen's eyes followed it. How his heart yearned over it. What would he have given for a little daughter to love him as this child loved Laure.

Lady Ulverston heard a deep long sigh, and she guessed rightly that he could not control himself much longer. She rose from her seat and went up to her husband.

"Rudolph," she said, gently, "I am tired of being here.

I will take Lily for a walk round the garden. You will follow us at your leisure."

She did not look at Owen as she bowed to him—she could not have left him without one word had she done so; and he—his whole heart shone in his eyes as they followed her. Then, with a calm, grave face, he turned to Lord Ulverston and tried to understand what he was saying. But he was so unlike himself that the master of Ulvers gave up the hope of listening to any original plan that morning. He thought that all he had heard about the man was true, that he was most certainly in love with Pattie, and could think of nothing else.

Owen gazed at him with wonder, and thought:

"If he knew—this proud patrician—if he knew, what would he do or say?"

He was not quite himself; he had suffered an intensity of pain since he had left her—of pain, and of most unmeasured shame. He had all the noble man in him—he had pride, courage, bravery, and he suffered in proportion. He hated himself for not taking just vengeance; yet he could not take vengeance on her, he could not harm her; he loved her too well; he had spent the whole night out in the woods; he could not breathe in four walls; he must have air and space.

What was he to do? The right thing would be to claim her.

Claim her. He laughed aloud in bitter mockery at his own thoughts. He knew how little chance there was that this beautiful, queenly woman would ever go away with him.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"COME BACK TO ME."

HE is looking into her face with wondering, wistful, sorrowing eyes. It can not be Laure; the world changes. Nature changes, all things change; but surely, his beautiful, beloved, young wife never could change into this beautiful woman, who stands, with such words upon her lips, for she is saying to him:

"You must go, Owen; I can not bear it. This morning I was ill with agitation. You must go."

Three o'clock in the afternoon had come, and she stands

with him under King Charles's Oak. She has no fear, this brave, beautiful woman, who has dared to outrage so many laws, no fear; she says to herself that even should people see her there, even should her husband find her talking to him, there can be no harm. It would naturally be supposed that she was talking to him about his business.

She took off all her jewels before she went. She would not irritate him by the sight of them. She dressed herself in a sweeping robe of black silk, in which, against her wish, she looked more beautiful than ever. Since the scene in the morning she had come to one conclusion, he must go; she could not bear it. She loved him best, this man sprung from the people; she loved him better than the aristocratic man whose life was all honor; yet, because she so loved him she was pained for him and for herself, and he must go.

She could not bear it. She had seen the little Lily in his arms, had seen the wistful sorrow in his eyes, as he held the child; she had seen the mortal pain in his face, when his eyes, even against his own better will and sense, lingered on her. She had noted the terrible struggle that passed in his mind as to whether he should boldly claim or denounce her, or whether he should be mute, silent, and save her. She said to herself that she could not bear such another scene; and he stands before her now, pleading as though for dear life, for love, for honor, for Heaven.

"Give it all up, Laure," he said; "give it up; I have forgiven you; come back to me; I will work hard for you. Come back, dearest, and so find peace, honor, rest and Heaven at the end."

"I can never go back, Owen," she says, in a low voice, "never. I may, nay, I do love you best; but I could never go back; luxury is more than a habit with me now, it is a necessity. I could not live without it. After being Lady Ulverston, of Ulvers, I could not go back to any middle-class life; it would not be possible. I must stay where I am. I have, after a fashion, sold my soul for the luxury and magnificence which is so dear to me. I must pay the price."

"And you have no mercy, no pity for me, Laure?"

A quiver of pain passed over her face.

"There you mistake," she said. "I have infinite pity, the greatest pity for you. I wish you were in Lord Ulvers-

ton's place. You do not seem to understand, Owen; it is not that I love you less, but that I love wealth and luxury more."

"Have you thought of the end, Laure? Have you thought that your life is a life of sin, and that the end of it will be eternal death?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I shall have time to repent; I do repent," she said. "I remember enough of my mother's teachings to say that I do repent; that I am sorry from the very depths of my heart, but I can not undo it."

He saw that if he stood there pleading from morning until night her answer would always be the same. It was more than useless.

"Laure, I am an honest man," he said, "and I have lived a clear, stainless life before God and man. I know that if I go away from here, leaving you, I shall be a coward, a traitor, and an abettor in your sin; I know that."

"Yet," she said, gently; "you will do it."

"I ought not. I ought to be brave enough and at any price tell the truth."

"Owen," she said, firmly, "listen to me. If you did tell the truth, you would gain nothing by it—less than nothing. You might expose me, you might tell Lord Ulverston the truth, and he would at once separate from me; but you would gain nothing. I should not go back to you, Owen. I could not—I could never live that life again. It is idle to think of it. If you go to Lord Ulverston and tell him, which seems to me is the idea you have—if you do that, he will of course be very angry; he will send me away; he will go almost mad with irritation and annoyance, with sorrow and pain; but he will be sure to allow me a good income; and, my poor Owen, I should not come back to you, dear. All that you would gain is eternal enmity from me. Is that worth while?"

"No," he said, "I see. I understand. You are merciless, Laure. I understand. The world has taken possession of you; your heart is fixed on such idle, useless things as title, rank, position. Oh, foolish Laure; the love of one heart outweighs it all."

"In your opinion, not mine. You must go away, Owen;

you must leave me. You have never resisted my wishes; you must not now."

"Do you think that I can do it, Laure, after having looked in your face, looked in your eyes, heard your voice? Do you think that I can leave you, never to look on your face again? Ah, no, never, Laure."

Something of despair began to steal over her. What should she do, if he persisted in this? What would become of her? She could not endure the pain of his presence, yet he would not go."

"Owen," she said, gently, "you must see. Your own good feeling, your nice sense must tell you that we can not live here, under the same roof as it were—you, Lord Ulverston, and I. It would be monstrous."

"It is monstrous," he replied, quietly; "I can well imagine that any woman should shrink from the continual presence of two men whom she has betrayed."

Her face flushed.

"Owen," she said, quietly, "if you begin to be cruel to me, I shall think the end of the world has come."

"I am not cruel; the cruelty has been on your side," he answered.

She looked up at him suddenly; it seemed to her that she had found a way to manage him at last.

"Owen," she said, "it is better to speak quite truthfully; weak words and half words are of no use to us. Do you know what I have done—what, in plain English, is the name of the crime I have committed? It is an ugly word, Owen, and one that I never thought would be applied to me. I have been guilty of bigamy."

He started as she uttered the words. Coming from those beautiful lips it had a terrible sound.

"Bigamy," she continued. "Do you know the punishment of bigamy? I do. The crime has had some terrible attraction for me. When I have seen a case of bigamy, I have wondered if the time would ever come when sentence should be passed on me."

"Do not talk in that horrible fashion, Laure," he cried.

"It may be horrible, but it is none the less true. How can I guarantee Lord Ulverston's conduct? If he is very angry with me, he is as likely to bring the terror of the law on me as not. Owen, if you tell him, you expose me to

this. I may be tried for my sin, and condemned to suffer imprisonment. You know that I should not live one day in prison, so that I may safely say, that if you betray me to my husband you condemn me to death. You know best whether you would care to see me in a felon's cell or in the prison."

"You know that I would not," he said. "You have conquered me; I have not another word to say. I will not send you to a prison cell, Laure; you are safe from me."

He turned away with the same despair as when she had first spoken to him.

"Owen," she said, "quietly listen to me. I am not quite heartless. I am so sorry for you that I am willing to do anything except return to you. Owen, I can make you some little compensation if you will let me. I am not at all selfish. I will give you the most precious treasure that I have on earth. I will give you my boy."

He looked up at her with wonder.

"Will you really. Do you mean it?" he cried. "You will give me the child who is really my own son?"

"I will give him to you," she said. "He is very dear to me, dearer than the little Lily. I will give him to you. You shall take him away, and Owen, with the boy to love you, you may be happy. You can work for him, love him, make a name to leave him; you can love life again for his sake; you can make him the object for which you live."

Owen buried his face in his hands.

"Oh, my boy," he said, "my boy!"

"I shall write to you sometimes," she said, hurriedly; "and perhaps, once in life, I might see you again."

For a few moments the thought of the boy seemed to console him, and he spoke of it almost cheerfully.

"I am to have him all for my very own, Laure, and no one is to take him from me, no one is to interfere with him; I am to have him in my own way; he is to be altogether mine?"

"Yes," she replied, "yours and yours only."

Then his head dropped again.

"But you, Laure," he said; "the boy is beautiful, but he is not you. I want you—nothing will fill my life but you; you are so beautiful and so clever, Laure. I love you so well that you may persuade me to go away from you, but, my darling, it will be to die—not to live."

"I can not say much more to you now, Owen. Look, there are some of the keepers coming. Listen. I speak in deadly earnest. If you betray me it will be to a punishment worse than death. If you linger here some great catastrophe will happen. If you love me, Owen, go away and leave me in peace. Go and take your son with you. You will be happier with him than you ever could be with me."

"You do not care, then, if you never see me again, Laure, provided only that you are quite secure of your own safety?"

"I do care very much indeed," she said; "but it is no use caring, Owen; my fate is fixed. See, the keepers are coming this way."

"Laure," he said, "you dismiss me with less kindness than you would show to a dog."

"I dare not show you kindness," she answered; "you said once that you would follow me through the world and die dumb at my feet."

"You turn my own words against me," he cried.

She said, quickly:

"These men are coming to speak to you, Owen. I must go. I will see you again."

But she neither guessed how nor where.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A BROKEN HEART.

SHE walked away, not hurriedly, for that might have given the men the impression that she was there for the purpose of talking to Owen, and that they had interrupted her. Just as they reached the great tree she moved on caerlessly with a languid step, leaving him bewildered as he had never been before. The men spoke to him. He did not seem either to hear or understand. They repeated the question, and he looked at them with vague, dim eyes.

"You do not seem well, Mr. Mitchel," said one of them; "has my lady frightened you with her proud ways? She means no harm, but she is proud. My hair stands upright when she speaks to me."

The sound of her name aroused him. He must do nothing, say nothing, which would cast suspicion on her. The

punishment of bigamy was imprisonment; he must not send his beautiful beloved to prison. These men must not think it was my lady that had bewildered him. He raised his hand to his head.

"My lady has not frightened me," he said, "but I feel ill."

Then he settled the question they had come to ask him, and walked away.

"There is something queer about that man," said one to the other. "Did you see the queer, drawn look on his face?"

"I saw it, and I know what I think," was the reply. "I have seen it on the face of another man, and I never want to see it again. It means danger."

They passed on carelessly. That the shadow of a tragedy hung over the lordly mansion of Ulvers—who could tell? Owen followed them mechanically to some little distance. He wanted to see the child. He had not seen him since he knew that he was his own. He went to Chiltern's cottage and asked for him.

In a few minutes the boy came, full of life and happiness, shouting and singing in the flush of his childish joy. He had grown to love Owen. He looked up now into the pale, haggard face.

"Are we going to have a squirrel hunt?" he asked, seizing Owen's hand.

"Yes, if you like," he said. "Come with me."

The boy walked away with him happily enough, and kindly Mrs. Chiltern said:

"What a great pity it is that Mr. Mitchel has neither wife nor child of his own, he loves children so much. It seems to me the men who would make the best husbands never marry at all."

Owen walked on quickly to the woods. His heart was on fire. He wanted to take the child in his arms and kiss his face, to make him utter his name, to pour out the great wealth of his love on the boy—the boy who was his own, and who was to be his own forever more.

They reached their favorite spot, where the squirrels jumped nimbly from bough to bough. Owen was wise enough to see that the child's heart was longing to play with him. He put aside his own longing and his own desire, and played with him. They hunted the squirrels,

they gathered the nuts until the boy was tired, and then he took him in his arms.

The child looked up at him in wonder as the hot tears fell from Owen's eyes on his face. Such hot, passionate tears, and great sobs shook the strong frame, and seemed to tear the breast on which the curly head lay.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

Owen clasped him more tightly still.

"I am in such sore trouble, Johnnie," he said; "such sore, bitter trouble."

"Are you?" asked the wondering boy; then with a child's loving instinct, he threw his little arms round Owen's neck and kissed his face.

"Don't cry," he said, trying to comfort him; "don't cry; I love you."

"Do you love me, Johnnie?" he asked, his wistful eyes fixed on the bonny little face. "Do you really love me?"

"Yes, I do—better than nurse; better than Pattie; I love you best of all."

"Johnnie," said Owen, "look at me."

The bright, fearless eyes were raised to his.

"I want to ask you something. You say you love me—and oh, my little boy, I love you very much, more than you know. I shall tell you a secret one day, why I love you. Would you like to go away from here with me, a long distance away? We should have a pretty little house all our own. I would teach you all about the flowers and the trees. I would make you so happy, so unutterably happy. Will you come and live with me, to be my own little boy always, as long as you live?"

"Should we see Pattie?" he asked.

"Perhaps, sometimes; I am not quite sure," he answered.

"Should we ever see the beautiful lady—Lady Ulverston?" asked the child.

With a bitter, passionate cry he locked the child in his arms.

"No," he cried, "we should never see her. Oh, my darling, never—never."

"Then I will not go," said the boy. "I love her. I should not like to leave her."

"But I will make you so happy, Johnnie," pleaded Owen.

"No," said the child, "I will not leave her."

"Do you love her best?" he asked.

And the child was deaf to the pathos of the voice.

"Yes," said Johnnie, "I love her best."

These words broke his heart. They were the crown of his sorrows. Even this little child deserted him for his beautiful mother. He turned away with a moan, and something more than a moan came from his white lips—a thin stream of crimson blood. At first he thought little of it, and held his handkerchief to his mouth; but the thin stream grew stronger and some instinct told him that stream of crimson blood meant death.

In after hours doctors discussed the case. Some said that the vessel ruptured was in the lungs; that he had long been threatened with it; but the reality was the wandering life, the nights spent without sleep, the days without food, the anguish of mind and soul had killed him slowly, and the last drop, the last pain, was when the child he loved refused to go with him because he loved his mother best. Owen lay back faint and exhausted on the grass.

"Johnnie," he said, faintly, "bend over me. Say 'My dear father.'"

"My dear father," repeated the child, and a beautiful light came over the white face.

"Little Johnnie," he said, "my own son, my darling, run to the cottage, find Chiltern, and tell him that I am lying ill in the woods here. Bring him back with you!"

The child ran off to do his bidding, and Owen was left alone. The chances were if he had immediate help, proper restoratives, and all means taken to stop the bleeding, he might have lived; but he lay there faint and helpless, quite unable to move, the life-blood welling slowly from his white lips. It seemed to him that he lay there for hours. The leaves from the trees fell over him, the squirrels jumped fearlessly round him, the merry brown hares did not seem frightened at him, the birds sung just as sweetly, and the wind stirred the long grass.

While he lay dying, so slowly the time passed, a burning thirst and delirious fancies came to him, but through it all he preserved his consciousness. He was to die as he had lived—alone. He had suffered so. He wondered if it were all over, if his sad life had ended. If it were, might

God have mercy on Laure! No word of his, even in the agonies of death, must betray her. Even if he was dying he must not send for her. He must die as he had lived—alone. His words came back to him as he lay there: "He would follow her to the end of the world and die dumb at her feet."

They were long in coming; it seemed doubly long to him, with that burning thirst and that deadly exhaustion. The profound silence of the woods, broken only by the birds and the wooing wind, seemed weird-like to him. In the far distance he heard the sound of the child's voice; then there was the noise of breaking branches, hurried footsteps, and the loud tones of men.

"He is here," cried little Johnnie, and the next moment they were all around him—the child, Chiltern and the two keepers who had passed him a few hours ago.

"I knew he was dying," said one; "I saw death in his face. Death has a gray look like a shadow, and it lay over him as he stood by the great oak this afternoon."

They bent pityingly over him. Chiltern had tears in his eyes. They had sense and knowledge to see that he had bled his life away. They raised him kindly and laid him on the stretcher, then carried him to his solitary lodgings to die; but all the way poor Owen clasped the child's hand in his, and would not let him go. They laid him on the little bed and sent for a doctor, although they knew he could do nothing for him. Then Owen called Chiltern to him.

"Am I to die?" he asked.

"I am afraid so," he answered.

"Oh, thank God, thank God," he whispered; and in his heart he said to himself, how much better it was for him to die, for now, she, his darling, could marry Lord Ulverston and live without sin. He would have died gladly a hundred deaths to have secured her happiness and peace. They wondered at the sweet smile on his face when he turned to the boy.

"Johnnie," he said, "you must come to me in Heaven, will you?"

"Yes," said the child, "I will come."

Then the doctor arrived, and there was the usual examination, but the doctor shook his head gravely.

"If he had been attended to at first," he said, "he

might have lived; but he has simply bled to death. Nothing can save him."

Mrs. Chiltern came to nurse him, and when the doctor had gone she bent over him.

"My dear," she said, "you must have friends somewhere. Let me send for them."

But he whispered,

"No, I have not one—not one in the world."

"Think again," she said. "Is there no one you would like me to send for?"

He lay quite silent for some minutes thinking. He was dying and with his whole heart he longed to see her again. He might send and he might die with her dear face near him.

But to send for her would excite comment and gossip. He must not do that even to find happiness in death. He must die dumb.

"No," he replied, "there is no one, believe me—no one; but children always make me think of angels. Let little Johnnie stay with me until I die. How long will it be, Mrs. Chiltern, do they say?"

"Before the sunrise of to-morrow," she answered.

And then, taking Johnnie's hand in his, he lay quite still with whispered prayers on his lips.

CHAPTER XLV.

LORD ULVERSTON'S SUSPICIONS AROUSED.

THERE was a dinner-party at the Hall. The Earl of Roseaton, with his charming young countess, had arrived there on a visit, and Lord Ulverston had given a dinner-party in their honor. Lady Laure remembered this as she was returning from the oak; she had forgotten it until then.

The tumult and agitation of her mind had been so great since she had recognized Owen that she had remembered nothing else. As she walked back to the house she felt sure that all would now go well. Owen would go away. She congratulated herself on her own skill in having sent him from her; he never would draw her into danger, she knew that; she had used the only words which had the power of sending him away. All would go well. She

would give him the child. Poor Owen, he should have that comfort and consolation, no matter what happened. She should tell Pattie that she had given him permission to adopt Johnnie. It would be a nine-days' wonder, but Pattie would have all the credit of it, not she.

It was late in the afternoon when she reached the Hall, and Pattie met her with an anxious face.

"My lady," she said, "have you forgotten the dinner-party? You left me no orders about your dress."

"I had forgotten it," said my lady.

She was compelled to put all thoughts of Owen away, and give the whole of her attention to her toilet. On those days Lord Ulverston liked her to be well dressed, nothing would have annoyed him more than any failure on her part.

The dress decided upon was of the loveliest, the palest possible shade of pink brocade, half shrouded in rich white lace, and embroidered in seed pearls. A parure of pearls and a few white flowers completed one of the most effective toilets. No mention was made, either by mistress or maid, of Owen or the child. Pattie had that one wonderful qualification—she always knew when to speak, and when to keep silent.

The dinner party was, as usual at Ulvers, a grand success. No one understood the art of dinner or of dinner giving better than Lord Ulverston. He was the most courteous of hosts, the most charming of friends.

The ladies were in the drawing-room, and Lady Laure, looking over a folio of engravings for one which she wanted to show the countess, bent over the table. Her dress caught, and some of the pearl fringe was broken. It was a slight accident, yet but for it she would never have seen Owen Roden again.

At first she paid no attention to it, then the pearls annoyed her by falling whenever she moved. She excused herself to the countess, and went to her room; she rang for Pattie, intending to have the little rent in the fringe securely fastened. She rang once, twice, thrice, and no Pattie. The fourth time, angrily, and when Pattie hurriedly entered, with many apologies, Lady Ulverston saw that her face was wet with tears.

"Pattie, what is the matter?" she cried. "The boy—is anything wrong with the boy?"

"No, my lady. Have you not heard of the accident?" she cried.

"No, I have heard of no accident," said my lady. "What is it?"

"I don't know what it is; but Mr. Mitchel has been found dying in the woods—bleeding to death, my lady, though whether he hurt himself or any one hurt him, I do not know."

She might well wonder what had come to her lady, for the brilliant, beautiful mistress of Ulvers fell back with a shudder, white and helpless.

"Great Heaven!" she moaned, "have mercy on me."

One thought fastened on her heart and brain. It was that, in his despair, Owen Roden had killed himself. She was silent for a few minutes, then she said, slowly:

"Where is he, Pattie?"

"They have carried him to his lodgings," she replied. "I saw Chiltern, my lady; I met him as I was going down to the lodge; he told me that the child is with him; that Mr. Mitchel forbade them to send word to my lord; he would not allow him to be disturbed."

"But is it true, Pattie, that he is dying—really dying?"

"Quite true, my lady," sobbed Pattie. "Chiltern says he will not live until sunrise."

Then, with a quiver of her white face, Lady Ulverston laid her hands on Pattie's arm.

"My good friend," she said, "my true friend, you must help me; I must see him. You hear, if it costs me my life I must see him. But if I can see him without any one's knowing but yourself, so much the better for me. Do not look at me—do not speak to me, Pattie," she cried; "I must see him."

"He was not a stranger to you, then, my lady?" said the maid.

"No, he was not. Now you must help me. I shall leave the drawing-room as soon as I can. I can go alone, and you must keep the doors open until I return."

"I will do that," said Pattie.

She saw there was some mystery, and she was too loyal to ask the solution of it. Lady Laure could hardly tell how the next hour passed. There were music and laughter, the flashing of jewels, the fragrance of flowers, the silvery laughter of women while Owen lay dying.

Far from them, Owen, her husband, the man she loved—the kind generous man who had wooed her, the husband so true and tender of heart—who had been so pleased to take her home—Owen, whom she had left in such bitterness of sorrow, whom she had dishonored and betrayed. He lay dying.

"You look very ill, Laure," said her husband, coming to where she sat at the piano with dim eyes and a wistful face. "You look very ill, my darling."

She raised her dim, shadowed eyes to his.

"I am ill, Rudolph; that is my head aches. I can not tell you how it aches. I shall be so glad when this terrible night is over."

"I will see that our friends leave early," he said. "Go to your room, Laure, if you like. I will make your excuses."

She thought rapidly. If she went to her room she should not dare to leave the house until all the guests had left, and her husband had gone to his room. If she went, the chances were they would stay later; if she stayed they would go sooner.

"You are very kind, Rudolph," she said, "but no, I prefer remaining until they go."

The young countess soon perceived that her beautiful hostess was not quite herself. Laure was frightened at the pallor of her own face. She feared it must attract attention, and all the while Owen lay dying.

The hour of release came at last. One by one the visitors disappeared, then the earl and the countess withdrew. She was free to go to her own room, free to go to Owen.

"Good-night, Rudolph," she said, holding up her beautiful face for her husband to kiss, "good-night."

"Get up as fresh as a rose in the morning, Laure," he said; "you look like a lily to-night."

"I am tired," she said; "so tired, Rudolph."

Then she went to her room, trembling with impatience, panting, crying out in her haste and eagerness.

"Be quick, Pattie, he is dying. Remember—dying. Be quick! I must not delay one moment! I have delayed too long, but they would not go. It was so cruel; they would not stir. Quick, where is my cloak?"

"You will change your dress, my lady," she said, "surely?"

"No, I can not stop to change my dress. He may die. Give me a cloak, a shawl—anything that will hide my dress and my jewels."

Pattie gave her a long black cloak, which she threw over her head.

"You will wait for me, Pattie, at the side door in the side hall, you know. Wait there."

"I will wait, my lady," said the maid, "but I wish you would let me go with you. I am afraid harm will come of it."

"No harm can come," said Lady Ulverston. "Be careful for me, Pattie."

With light, quick steps she hurried away down the side staircase, through the side hall, through the court-yard and the small shrubbery, hurrying as though for dear life, for Owen lay dying.

As she drew near the stables she stopped suddenly, for a light was shining there. Yet what did it matter? It could only be some of the grooms. They would not see her. She hurried past.

It so happened that Lord Ulverston's favorite hunter had met with an accident, and he, feeling very uncomfortable over it, had gone, late as it was, to hear the groom's last report about it. That report was favorable, and Lord Ulverston was very much relieved.

The night was fine, and he remained a few moments to smoke a cigar; then, as he threw away the last ashes it seemed to him that a tall dark-robed figure passed quickly through the shrubbery. Then surely as the stars shone in heaven he saw the face of his own wife as she passed by the carriage-house.

At first he felt timid for one half moment. He had just left her going to her own room, pale and tired; now he saw her hurrying for her dear life. Was it Laure or was it his own fancy?

He was quite undecided for a few minutes. It seemed so perfectly impossible that it should be Laure, yet he had most certainly seen her face. The only thing to do under the circumstances was to follow her, yet where at this hour of night could she be going alone? The tall dark figure went on swiftly. He followed down the broad glades, down the shady avenue of chestnut, down the broad drive, and it stopped before the door of the little lodge where

Mitchel lived. Something unusual was there, he felt sure. There were lights in the windows, shadows on the blinds. "It can not be Laure," he said. "It was a trick of fancy. It must be Pattie."

Yet why should Pattie steal out here in the silence of midnight? Lord Ulverston was quiet for a few minutes; then he decided that there was evidently some mystery on foot, and it was his duty to penetrate it.

The tall figure entered the house; then after a few minutes he saw its shadow on the white blind of the upstairs room; another minute, and he heard a cry. Ah, the bitterness, the passion of that cry! He knew the voice; it was his wife's.

He went in, and as he crossed the threshold he heard Mrs. Chiltern say:

"Not while my lady is there."

The women uttered a little cry when they saw him. He laid his hand on Mrs. Chiltern's arm.

"Silence," he said, "my wife, Lady Ulverston, has gone up those stairs. I must follow her!"

He went up, and they did not dare to stop him by one single word.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"WHAT IS MY WIFE DOING HERE?"

When Lady Ulverston entered the lodge, she saw Mrs. Chiltern, who gazed at her with wonder. My lady went to her.

"Is it true," she said, "that Ow—that Mr. Mitchel lies here dying—is it true?"

"Quite true, my lady," she answered, with a deep courtesy.

"I want to see him alone—I knew some one whom he knew once; and I want to tell him about her. You will keep my visit a secret?"

"Your ladyship may trust me," said the kindly woman; "indeed I am to be trusted."

"I will give anything," gasped Lady Laure, "if you will secure me one half hour with him alone."

"That I will do," was the answer.

Then the master of the cottage, hearing voices, came in, and he also promised faithful silence.

"I will make you both rich for life," said my lady, to whom money was dross; "only secure me one half hour with him."

"The child is with him," said Mrs. Chiltern, "and he will never loose his hold until he dies."

Lady Ulverston looked at first as though they had struck her a mortal blow. The child—Owen's own son was with him.

"It will not matter about the child," she said, gently. "Show me the way to his room."

The lodge was a picturesque, comfortable, well-built house. It had two floors, and on the upper floor lay Owen Roden, who was to see the sun on earth no more.

Lady Ulverston went slowly and gently up the narrow staircase. She saw the light shining in one of the rooms, and, pushing the door, she entered without a sound.

What a pitiful sight met her eyes! The little one, tired with his long vigil, lay by Owen's side fast asleep, and Owen had no other to cling to in his dying hour than the little child. The beautiful face was flushed with slumber, the brown curls lay in tangled richness over the pillow; the little hands clasped Owen's own, as though only death could unclasp them; and Owen lay dying, with his eyes fixed on the child's face. She went up to the bedside.

"Owen," she said, and his pale face flushed at the sound of that dear voice. He looked at her as she stood there: the dark cloak had fallen from her shoulders; her rich dress, with its pearl fringe, was in picturesque disarray; the jewels on her neck and on her white arms gleamed in the feeble light; her golden hair had fallen over her neck. She had never looked so beautiful in all her life as when she stood by her husband's death-bed ready to risk all for a few words with him. "Owen," she repeated, and gently drew his hands from the child. He opened his arms to her; infinite love shone in the dying face, infinite pity in the dying eyes. He opened his arms.

"Oh, my love, my love!" he cried, aloud, "my wife!"

Then she buried her face on his breast, and sobbed aloud. She loved him best; as she knelt there, all the love of her early days came back to her, the fond, sweet love; and she clasped her white arms round him.

"Let me die with you, my darling!" she cried.

"I am glad to die, Laure," he said, faintly. "If I had

lived, you must have lived in sin; you must have been miserable; now you can love me without wrong, you may love me dead, as you could not have loved me living. For your sweet sake, Laure, I am glad to die."

Was there ever love like his love?

He went on:

"When I have been dead some time, Laure, you must tell Lord Ulverston the story; you need not tell him all, only enough to show him that your marriage was not legal, and that you must be married again. I have been thinking about it, Laure, my love; when quite free, then for your soul's sake, your honor's sake, your children's sake, you must remarry Lord Ulverston."

"I know," she said.

"Promise me you will do it, Laure; that no false pride, no false shame, will prevent it. Will you promise?"

"I do promise," she replied. "I will keep my word, Owen."

"I have given you up on earth, my darling," he said; "but I shall wait for you in Heaven; there you will belong to me forever and for evermore."

Was there ever love like his? He was willing to die that she might be free; he had yielded all claim to her on earth for her own sake, hoping to meet her in Heaven.

"Laure," he said, with a faint smile, "I have kept my word to the very letter; I have followed you, and I die dumb, my darling; I have kept your secret. I die dumb, my darling; not at your feet, but in your arms. Kiss me, Laure."

She bent over him, her beautiful face wet with tears, her golden hair sweeping his pillow.

"Owen," she whispered, as she laid her lips on his, "do you quite forgive me? I love you best; I have loved you best all along. Do you quite forgive me?"

"Quite, with all my heart; my pardon is great and ample as my love," he said; then she laid her sweet, fresh lips on his.

A voice startled them, the dying husband and the guilty wife—a voice, deep, stern, and angry, cried:

"Let me ask, in the name of Heaven, what this means?"

Owen saw the tall figure and angry face of Lord Ulverston at the door. Laure recognized his voice and, clinging to Owen, cried:

"Let me die with you; Owen, do not leave me!"

Lord Ulverston closed the door, and came up to the bedside.

"In the name of Heaven, what does this mean, Laure, my wife? What are you doing here? Why have you kissed this man's face? Why are you kneeling by his side? What does it mean?"

"Owen," she cried again, "take me with you. I dare not, I can not brave it all!'

Lord Ulverston bent over the bed.

"It is Mitchel!" he cried. "They said down-stairs you were dying, but they did not tell me who you were. Mitchel, you are an honest man. What has brought my wife here in this fashion? and the child—you have Johnnie here! There is more in this than I understand."

The sound of angry voices woke the child, and he turned instinctively to Owen. It was the most pitiful group—the dying father, the weeping wife, and the little child! When Lord Ulverston saw the three clinging together, a strange expression came into his face.

"In God's name," he cried, "I demand to know what this means, Laure! Mitchel, speak to me. What is it? what is my wife, Lady Ulverston, doing here? Answer me, Mitchel!"

But no; he had said that he would die dumb.

"I have no answer, my lord, to make," he replied.

"What are you to Lady Ulverston? Why is she here? Why should she caress you?"

Owen passed his hand with a caressing gesture over the golden head; he drew her closer to him with a gesture that had in it something of protection.

Lord Ulverston's face flushed crimson when he saw it.

"What is it?" he cried. "What lies under the surface? Mitchel, speak to me—what is my wife to you?"

"I shall die dumb, my darling," he whispered, fainting.

But Laure raised her face from his breast, white as the face of living woman never was before.

"I should have told him, Owen," she said; "I will tell him now; and if he will not forgive me, I will die with you!"

Ah! you who think that sin has no punishment, you who think the way of sin is easy and pleasant, who believe it possible to prosper in wrong-doing, you should have been

present while Lady Ulverston paid the penalty of hers. Sin wears a smiling mask, a death's-head hides behind it; sin has a siren voice, a death-wail follows it. Every sin will as certainly bring its punishment, as sure as death follows life.

Her punishment came now when she turned from the dying to the living man with that story of shame and sorrow on her lips. It was a scene full of passion and tragedy.

The dying man clinging to the child, clinging to the beautiful woman whose white, despairing face was raised to him, who asked for justice, clinging to her, yet longing to protect her, to take her in his feeble arms and shield her against the rage of the man she had betrayed.

Is sin easy, pleasant, and unpunished? She did not think so as she turned with despair from the dying man.

"Let me speak," she said. "I shall have to tell him. Let me tell him now."

"What have I to hear?" cried Lord Ulverston; "surely, if ever a man trusted his love and honor to a woman's hands, I have left mine in yours, Laure!"

"I am a miserable sinner," she said, bowing her head; "I can not expect that you will forgive me, Rudolph. He loved me with a faithful, wonderful love, that even my falsity and cruelty has never changed. I can not expect that you will ever forgive me. Left to myself, I should never have told you; but it seems to me that God Himself, in punishment of my sins, has brought me here at your feet."

"Laure," said Lord Ulverston, "what are you thinking of? What are you saying? Do not kneel there, let me bring you a chair; it seems to me that you have gone mad!"

But she would not take the chair, she would kneel by Owen's side, clasping Owen's hand, while for the second time she told the story of her sin.

Told it with passionate tears and prayers, sparing herself no detail, making no false excuse, no pretense. She told him the plain, unvarnished, simple truth, and when the terrible story was told she buried her face again on Owen's breast.

Lord Ulverston listened and looked like a man turned to stone. When she had finished, he was some few min-

utes before he spoke, and then, standing erect and proud before her, he said:

"It is a nameless sin; it is so much worse than any other crime I know that I call it a nameless sin."

She bent her beautiful head in lowly humility before him.

"You were right in saying that I should never pardon you," he said; "I never shall."

And the arms of the dying man clasped her more tightly.

"I will try to soften his heart, Laure," he said, "do not despair."

CHAPTER XLVII.

HER PUNISHMENT.

"I WILL not reproach you," said Lord Ulverston; "I should imagine that in your case reproaches are quite useless. A woman hardened in crime could not have done worse. Pray, does the marquis know anything of this story yet?"

"No," said Laure; "not one word. And you will not tell him? You may refuse to forgive me; I do not deserve it; but you will not tell him? He loves me, and trusts me—you will not tell him?"

"I can hardly tell you what I shall do," said Lord Ulverston. "I am so completely bewildered! I know if I did what was right, I should quit this room now, and never look at your false face again."

She had resumed her place at Owen's side. The worst was over for her; her story was told.

"Yes," she said, "that would serve me right—that is what you should do. I could not expect to be loved twice in the same way. You will never forgive me. I know it; Owen, if I might but die with you!"

"Death even does not cover dishonor," said Lord Ulverston, gravely. "I would rather that you had died than have lived to tell me this shameful story. Death is preferable to sin. Have you ever thought of the wrong you have done me? Thank Heaven no son of mine calls you mother!"

Yet human passion and human rage fade in the grand, majestic presence of death; the wrath and anger that filled

Lord Ulverston's heart could not have found vent in words yet; the presence of death disarmed him. There was a light on that white face that did not come from earth; there was something, too, in the pathetic courage with which the dying man defended the beautiful erring woman that touched his heart.

Owen held out his hand, and Lord Ulverston went nearer to him. There is a majesty in death that no one can resist.

"My lord," he pleaded, "forgive her. She was so young and so beautiful—who and what was I that she should care for me?"

"She knew the law of God and man; neither youth nor beauty forms the least excuse for having broken it," he replied.

"Forgive her, my lord; she was so young she did not think, she did not realize what she was doing; she was suffering so greatly! Oh, my lord, be pitiful to her! She has sinned, but she has suffered; be pitiful. You will ask pardon some day for sin; what will you do if it be refused?"

"Her sin has no name. She has deceived us both."

"Yet I forgive her. I would not injure one hair on her dear head; I would not cause her one moment's sorrow for the whole world. My lord, you are noble, I am plebeian; the most noble man forgives most completely; I forgive her. But for this illness I should have gone away, silent even under torture, and have left her; yet I love her dearer than my life."

His hands trembled on her golden head.

"My lord, do not be less generous than I. Only think what your refusal to pardon her would cost her—her good name, her position, everything in life! think of the effect upon her if you drive her to despair. Be pitiful to her. I could not rest in my grave if you refused to forgive her!"

"You plead for her, whom she has so greatly injured?" said Lord Ulverston.

"I plead for her out of the greatness of my own love," said Owen. "I can not understand a love that is not strong enough for all pardon. Surely no man living ever loved a woman as I have loved her, with strong human love, too; yet I ask you to forgive her, and to marry her when I shall be dead."

"Never!" cried Lord Ulverston—"never!"

But his heart was softer than he believed it to be. The dying eyes fixed on his face, the dying voice pleading for her, the helpless hand lying on the golden head—all touched him.

"I can not die," moaned Owen; "my hour is come, but I can not die until you will forgive her. If I die while she is unpardoned, there will be no one to plead for her. Oh, my lord, for God's sake pardon her!"

Lord Ulverston bent over him.

"You love her faithfully," he said, "and your love touches me. I will promise you one thing; I will remarry her; I will make her my wife for Lily's sake; I can not promise that I will love her—that is beyond me; but she shall be my wife. Will that please you?"

A smile that seemed all light came over his face.

"Yes," he said, "I am content, my lord; you will let her stay with me until I die?"

"Yes," was the brief answer, as Lord Ulverston turned away, unable to bear the sight any longer.

Then Owen gathered his wife and child both in his arms; it was for the first and last time; it was in death, not life, and he died when the morning sunbeam touched his face and formed a glory round his head.

My lady's secret was kept; indeed, the fact of her husband following her and staying with her seemed to take all thoughts of suspicion away from them.

My lady went back in the early morning light, and Pattie let her in at the side-door.

"He is dead," said Lady Ulverston, briefly; and she went to her own room. There she remained for many days; her visitors were told that she was ill, suffering from nervous fever, and they left her. What she suffered was best known to God and herself.

Lord Ulverston acted nobly. He went himself to Rosethorpe, and poor Owen was buried in the little green church-yard belonging to the church where he had married Laure. He erected a simple monument to his memory, and on it he placed his name: "Owen Roden," and the only words after that were the two Latin ones: "*Semper fidelis*"—always faithful.

Then when my lady recovered, they went away together and alone to some quiet little town in the north of England, and there they were married.

Lord Ulverston did another noble act: he amply provided for the boy; he sent him to an excellent school, after which he bought him a commission in the army. He called him always by his father's name—Owen Roden.

So far all went well; my lady's secret was kept. Lord Ulverston never betrayed one word, so it would seem that her sin was never punished.

This was her punishment: that her hubsand was five years before he learned to care for her again; that he was kind and attentive; but he never kissed her face or said a loving word to her; that for five long years he watched her constantly, he mistrusted her, he had no faith in her, he was often and for long weeks together absent from her. He seemed to change his character altogether. All this she had to bear in silence. While the world fêted and caressed her, she was miserable beyond words.

Her punishment increased as she grew older and wiser, better able to understand what she had done, better able to loathe herself for her nameless sin.

Then when the five years of trial had ended, her husband's heart turned to her again, but there was a difference that she keenly felt between this and his former love.

She remembers her sin when she sees that he mistrusts her, when men speak of the falsity of woman, when women laugh at their own errors.

It never leaves her, the memory of the nameless sin. When her brow is circled by shining gems and the world bows before her, when the great and mighty of the land praise and honor her, she thinks of Owen, and raises her heart to Heaven for pardon of that Nameless Sin.

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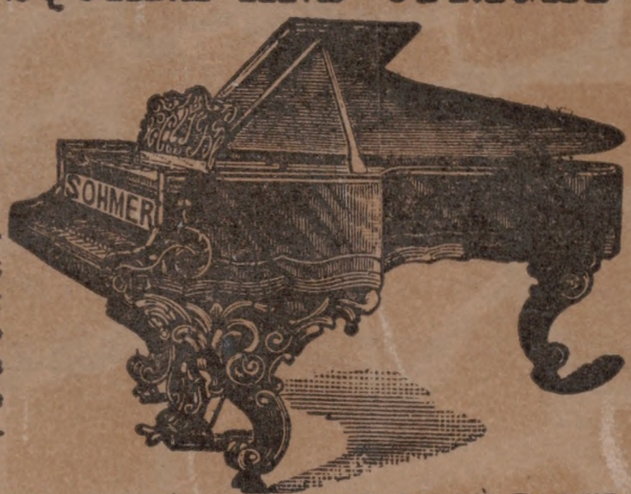

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